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Non-traditional Sex Role Socialisation : Parents'

Perceptions of Non-sexist Childrearing

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Abstract

Despite a growth of research documenting attempts to counteract sex role stereotypes in the school and work environments and in the media, little is known about non-traditional sex role socialisation within the home. This study explored the aims, philosophy and reported practice of thirty white, middle-class parents committed to non-sexist childrearing, who between them had eighteen daughters and twelve sons aged six months to eleven years. Data was collected through semi-structured interviewing, mostly carried out in 1979 and 1980, and four 'case-study' families were visited over a three-year period. The main finding was that the conception of non-sexist child-rearing held by these parents was more complex than the social learning position originally stressed by the Women's Liberation Movement, with its emphasis on controlling the child's environment in terms of toys, clothes, books, parental models and reinforcement patterns. The parents in this study also took account of the child's active participation in the socialisation process, of psychological factors within themselves and the dynamics of their relationship with their children, and of the role of economic and structural factors in limiting the possibilities for sex role change.

(ii)

They adopted an androgynous conception of sex roles and saw themselves as opening up more options for their children rather than as trying to reverse traditional sex roles or to make both sexes more 'masculine' or more 'feminine'. Non-sexist childrearing was perceived to be more difficult with sons than daughters, and most parents expressed greater ambivalence about raising sons in a less sex-stereotyped way. The emphasis in non-sexist childrearing was on altering the socialisation of daughters, and the impetus for sex role change came from women.

INTRODUCTION

1. Terminology and Assumptions

This study examines the ideas and reported childrearing practices of a group of parents who were committed to minimising sex role stereotyping in the upbringing of their children. In this thesis, I shall use the terms 'non-traditional sex role socialisation' and 'non-sexist childrearing' interchangeably when discussing the views and behaviour of these parents. The value judgement implied by 'non-sexist' is one which was shared by all of the parents in the study; they believed that the traditional sex role stereotypes of western industrial societies are oppressive and unjust and limit the potential of both women and men. A fundamental assumption underlying their view, and implicit in the research presented here, is that these sex role stereotypes are not totally biologically determined and can be influenced by social and environmental factors. Evidence exists to support both the proposition that traditional sex roles are not inevitable, and that they are inequitable.

Biological explanations for traditional sex roles are contradicted by the fact that the behaviours prescribed for men and women vary greatly from one society to another (Linton 1936, Mead 1935) and from one time period to another within the same culture; by the evidence from

studies of children reared in the opposite gender from their biological or chromosomal sex, whose behaviour and attitudes seem to depend more on whether they were brought up as a girl or a boy than on their genetic make-up (Money and Erhardt 1972); and by studies which show that the majority of widely-believed differences in personality and abilities between the sexes are not supported by the evidence, apart from small differences in favour of boys on certain measures of mathematical and spatial ability and aggression and in favour of girls on tests of verbal ability (Maccoby and Jacklin 1975). Apart from the basic reproductive differences which dictate that men impregnate while women menstruate, gestate and lactate, there are no sex differences which can be unequivocally attributed to biological causes, since environmental factors interact with biological ones even before a child is born. As Ann Oakley has pointed out, "if gender has a biological source of any kind, then culture makes it invisible" (Oakley 1974). Most social scientists have recognised that attempting to disentangle biological and cultural causes of sex roles is an impossible exercise, and have adopted an interactionist approach to the issue (Archer 1978). The nature/nurture debate is a fruitless one which diverts attention from larger questions of social justice.

"If a particular sex difference is incompatible with important aspects of social equality, we should argue for compensatory measures independent of biological causation." (Lambert 1978:117)

The second assumption underlying this thesis is that traditional sex roles are "incompatible with important aspects of social equality". The training of girls to be passive, obedient, nurturant caretakers of home and family and of boys to be strong, tough and competitive, perpetuates a situation that is oppressive to women both individually and collectively, as many feminist writers have argued (Millet 1971, De Beauvoir 1960, Firestone 1970, Barrett 1980) and which has negative consequences for men too, although of a different order (Jourard 1971, Palme 1972, Tolson 1977). Sex role stereotypes limit occupations, relationships and personal potential, and are particularly negative in their effects on women because the stereotypes are not only of the male and female role as different, but of the male role as superior to the female one. Numerous studies have shown that women are perceived as inferior and less competent than men even when producing identical work (Golberg 1968, O'Leary 1974, Feldman-Summers and Kiesler 1974), and that the female stereotype leads women to fear success and to under-achieve (Horner 1969). Broverman et al's classic work with mental health professionals demonstrated that the qualities which these professionals considered 'desirable'

and 'healthy' in an adult, sex unspecified, were much more likely to be associated with the male than with the female stereotype. Mature, healthy women were seen as submissive and dependent (Broverman et al 1970). As Broverman and her colleagues comment in a later paper, "women are clearly put in a double bind by the fact that different standards exist for women than for adults". (Broverman et al 1972:75).

Given that traditional sex roles can and should be altered, one avenue for change would be through the socialisation of children within the family. The research presented in this thesis was undertaken to investigate the meaning of non-sexist childrearing to a group of parents who were attempting to bring up their children in a non-sex-stereotyped way, to relate their ideas to current theories of sex role learning, and to consider the extent to which they can achieve their aims within the existing social structure.

Research on non-traditional sex role socialisation within the family has to date been conspicuous by its absence. Much has been written about traditional childrearing ideologies and practice, and since the early seventies there has been a rapid growth of interest in the subject of sex role stereotyping and its effects, but no attempt

has been made to link these two areas by investigating parental attempts to modify sex role stereotyping in the home environment. There have been reports of efforts to foster sexual equality in institutions outside the home, for instance through Equal Opportunities legislation or the development of non-sexist curricula in schools, but non-traditional sex-role socialisation within the family remains a largely unexplored field. In this study I investigate and analyse the ideas and experiences of a group of parents committed to minimising sex role stereotyping in the upbringing of their children.

2. Organisation of thesis

The thesis is divided into four main sections. The first, which comprises chapters 1 to 3, provides the background to the research. Chapter one offers a perspective against which to view the ideas of the parents in this study, by reviewing the available literature on sex role attitudes and practices. It draws on data from psychological and sociological studies of sex roles, from surveys of attitudes towards sex role equality and from surveys investigating how paid work, childcare and domestic work are divided between men and women in practice. It draws also on an analysis of contemporary manuals of child-rearing advice and on data from observational studies of parent-child interaction. The three major theories

which analyse how these sex roles are acquired are outlined in chapter two, together with a review of typical studies which have been used to develop and support them. Chapter three presents the research design and deals with methodological considerations of the collection and analysis of the data.

The second main section of the thesis begins in chapter 4 with an analysis of the backgrounds of the parents in the study, firstly to provide a more detailed picture of the families involved in the research and secondly to explore the connections between the parents own upbringing and their ideas about childrearing now they are parents themselves. Chapter five outlines their aims and ideals in relation to non-sexist childrearing, and places their views within the context of current discussions about the nature of masculinity, femininity and androgyny, and about the relationship between gender identity, sex role and sexual orientation. Chapters six to eight describe the various means by which the parents I studied had attempted to influence their children to develop non-traditional sex-role perceptions and behaviours and relates their ideas and practices to the three major theories of sex role learning.

In the third section of the thesis I look at the limits

which were placed on the parents' ability to raise children in a less sex-stereotyped way, considering in chapters 9-11 the mechanisms which make such an attempt difficult.

These include the education system, the organisation of the labour market, and the subordinate position of women in a male-dominated society.

Chapter 12 in the final section of the thesis presents detailed case-studies of four families to examine in depth the themes developed in the rest of the work, and the final chapter provides a summary and conclusions.

CHAPTER ONE

PERSPECTIVES ON SEX ROLE SOCIALISATION

1.0 Introduction

The parents who participated in this study were all 'non-sexist' in the sense that they had devoted time and effort to considering ways in which they could encourage their children to grow up without following traditional stereotypes of masculinity and femininity. In order to put their ideas into perspective it is necessary to understand both the nature of the traditional sex roles which they were rejecting, and the extent to which conceptions of appropriate sex roles are moving in an increasingly egalitarian direction amongst the general population. The first section of this chapter reviews the social science literature on sex role socialisation (with the exception of research in the area of gender identity acquisition, which is dealt with separately in the next chapter) and charts the trend in much of the social science literature towards re-evaluation of traditional sex roles. The second section reviews briefly the literature on class and racial differences in sex role stereotypes, and the third section presents the evidence from studies of male attitudes and practice in order to see how the re-evaluation of traditional stereotypes in

the literature is reflected in the ideas and behaviour of the general population. Section four examines the extent to which childrearing attitudes and practices have been affected by more liberal attitudes towards sex roles, through an analysis of childrearing advice manuals, through a review of surveys of current attitudes towards childrearing, and through a review of observational studies of parent-child interaction. The fifth section reviews the literature on structural barriers to sex role change, and section six summarises the perspective which this chapter provides, from which to view the ideas of the non-sexist parents described in this thesis.

1.1 The Social Science Literature on Sex Roles

Reviewing the social science literature on sex roles, several trends become obvious. The first is that this is a growth area of psychological and sociological research. The number of entries under the heading 'sex-es' in Sociological Abstracts for 1969 was seventy-one, in 1979 there were over two hundred entries under this heading and a separate classification was considered necessary for articles dealing specifically with sex roles, containing another hundred articles. By 1975 there was enough research and interest in the topic to justify the creation of a regular journal devoted entirely to the subject of sex roles, with that as its title. (Published by Plenum Press)

The second major trend is the changing nature of the studies, from those which documented and upheld traditional conceptions of sex roles, often assuming them to have a substantial biological basis, to those which began to question and criticise traditional notions of masculinity and femininity, and to stress the cultural determinants of sex roles. The third theme is the relative absence, despite the critical nature of many of the more recent studies, of accounts of attempts to actually modify traditional sex role stereotypes.

Psychologists working in the area of sex role research have concentrated on measuring sex-typed personality characteristics and sex differences in behaviour and ability, while sociologists have investigated various aspects of sex role behaviour. In the first area, Rosenkrantz's classic study in 1968 documented the traditional stereotypes of masculinity and femininity held by a sample of 154 American college students. When asked to rate 122 bipolar personality characteristics in terms of their relevance to the 'average male' and the 'average female', the average female was described as emotional, submissive, dependent, tactful, gentle, passive, conceited, home-oriented, illogical, easily influenced and aware of the feelings of others. The

average male was seen as aggressive, independent, unemotional, dominant, active, competitive, logical, adventurous, ambitious, never cries, a leader, likes mathematics and science (Rosenkrantz et al. 1968).

Content analyses of studies of sex role stereotypes indicate that although there is some variation in the precise adjectives used to describe men and women, the characteristics attributed to males revolve around the dimension of instrumentality, those considered appropriate for women around the affective dimension. (Unger 1979)

While articles in the psychological journals in the late 1950s and early 1960s had focussed on describing how children learnt traditional sex roles and on inventing tests to assess how well they had learnt them (e.g. Brown 1957), the literature in the later sixties and the 1970s increasingly began to question the value of these traditional roles, and the assumption that they were an essential part of personality development.

Broverman's study of mental health clinicians demonstrated that the stereotypes they held about the characteristics of psychologically healthy men and women placed women in an impossible position, since some of the characteristics they saw as appropriate for a healthy woman, like dependency and submissiveness, were incompatible with their conceptions of a healthy adult, sex unspecified (Broverman et al 1970).

Joseph Pleck described what he termed the 'traditional' and the 'new' views of sex roles, the traditional view assuming that there are substantial biologically-based differences between men and women and that both sexes need to behave in sex-appropriate ways for their psychological well-being; the new view assuming that biologically-based differences are fewer and less important than supposed and that sex role stereotypes may handicap rather than facilitate an individual's personal growth.

(Pleck 1977) At Stanford University, Sandra Bem developed tests which allowed individuals to score highly on both 'masculine' and 'feminine' personality traits as an alternative to the bipolar scoring techniques underlying previous personality inventories. She termed such high-scoring individuals 'androgynous', from the Greek 'andros' (man) and 'gyne' (woman), and demonstrated that they were more flexible than traditionally sex-typed subjects on a variety of experimental tasks. (Bem 1974, 1975)

Her work stimulated a new trend of research into sex roles. Articles were written suggesting that compared to more sex-typed individuals, androgynous people had higher self-esteem (Schiff et al 1978), were more confident, (Gayton et al 1978), extravert, stable, behaviourally adaptable (Orlofsky and Windle 1978) and in possession of a whole host of other desirable personality characteristics. Some of the investigations could be ridiculed,

as Lenney did in her caricature of researchers who, "with the new scales in hand, enthusiastically set out to discover how androgyny was related to almost every conceivable variable in almost every imaginable population", but as she admits, the concept of androgyny "expressed the Zeitgeist in sex-role research". (Lenney 1979: 705, 704).

The original focus in the new wave of literature on sex roles was on the limiting and oppressive aspects of women's roles, stimulated by the growth of the Women's Liberation Movement, but this was later broadened to include a recommendation for change in the male sex role too in order to achieve any kind of sexual equality. Books and articles began to appear in increasing numbers in both America and Britain describing 'Some Lethal Aspects of the Male Role', 'The Male Machine', 'The Limits of Masculinity' and 'The Male Dilemma' (Fasteau 1974, Tolson 1977, Steinmann and Fox 1974). These and other authors (usually male, e.g. Bear et al, 1979, Nichols 1975, Pleck 1976, Harrison 1978, Moreland 1980) describe the restrictions of the 'he-man' role; the pressure to be a breadwinner and engage in the 'rat race', the need to appear strong, tough and confident, the denial and repression of emotions - what has been termed 'psychic celibacy', "keeping women mentally and emotionally at

arm's length". (Bianchi and Reuther 1976)

This investigation into the psychological aspects of the male role was paralleled by a rapid growth in interest among sociologists (and some psychologists too) in the topic of fathering. The second half of the 1970s saw the rise of an image of the 'involved father', reflected in a series of books about fatherhood (Biller and Meredith 1975, Lamb 1976, Dodson 1974, Parke 1981, McKee and O'Brien 1982), in special issues of journals devoted to fathering (e.g. The Family Co-ordinator in 1976 and 1979, The Journal of Social Issues 1978), and in lip-service paid by child advice manuals to the importance of men being involved in family life (given, naturally, the constraints imposed by their fulltime jobs outside the home). As Robert Fein concluded in 1978 from his review of research on fathering:

"Discussion of fathering is becoming fashionable . . . men are being urged to participate in the lives of their children, from conception on."
(Fein 1978)

'Fathering' had evidently acquired a new meaning; whereas it originally referred only to being the biological father and did not require a man to actually do anything (beyond conception), it was now being used in a similar way to the word 'mothering'. The verb 'to parent' also found its way into the English language,

apparently in response to a felt need for a term that could apply to tasks that both parents did alike.

Some investigators felt that this new image of the involved father could reduce rather than encourage equality, by allowing men access to some of the benefits of childrearing without having to give up their position of power and superiority. Lesley Holly saw it as a political question of how men could enjoy their children and family life without having to give up social and economic power or routinely be involved in the hard work of childrearing, and she argued that the current emphasis on fatherhood is men's attempt to solve that dilemma "by creating an atmosphere where fatherhood is seen as an essential contribution to childrearing" (Holly 1981: 17). Others have argued that it reflects the move towards women's equality, and that a consideration of the changing roles of women also requires that men's role within the family be investigated (McKee and O'Brien 1982). Whatever the reasons, this growth of interest in fathering does indicate a move away from the traditional stereotype of men as lacking in tenderness, sensitivity and caring, and of women as the only ones able to nurture children adequately.

These studies of fathering are one sign of the emphasis

in the sociological literature on changing sex roles. Another indication is the increasing amount of research into such issues as women's labour force participation, the division of labour between men and women within the home, 'dual-career' families, the effects of maternal employment on children, and sex role stereotyping in the media, education system and the job market. These topics, which were relatively absent from sociology textbooks thirty years ago, are now thoroughly covered not only in general textbooks but also in books specifically devoted to the sociology and psychology of gender (e.g. Chetwynd and Hartnett 1978, Davidson and Gordon 1979, Delamont 1980, Oakley 1981).

1.2 Class and race differences in sex role stereotypes

The stereotypes of 'masculine' and 'feminine' behaviour described above are mainly derived from studies using white, middle-class subjects, and the majority of them Americans. There is some evidence that what is regarded as appropriate sex role behaviour varies depending on the individual's socio-economic and ethnic background.

There had been very little research on the effect of race on sex roles, "one of the biggest blind spots in existing sociology", as Arlie Hochschild pointed out back in 1973. Since then there have been some studies which do address this question and suggest that a person's

ethnic background affects the kind of sex role behaviour that is seen as appropriate. Romer and Cherry investigated the sex role perceptions of Jewish, Italian and black children aged ten to seventeen, and found that:

"For Jews and Italians, both white ethnic groups, middle class status brings greater sex-role blending. For Blacks, middle class status brings greater sex role differentiation. Middle class status probably means different things to Blacks and Whites. For Whites, middle class status may bring greater freedom from traditional restrictions; for Blacks, middle class status may bring stricter adherence to another culture's rules". (Romer and Cherry 1980, 261)

The cultural context must definitely affect the kind of sex role behaviour that is seen as appropriate. Black women in poor areas of America, for example, who are more likely to have access to an income (of sorts) from child benefit payments than are black men to have a regular source of money from a job, see it as appropriate for a woman to have a strong role in the family and to control resources. (Stack 1974).

The relationship between gender and class has been the subject of much theoretical debate among feminists (Hart 1980, Sargent 1981), and the effect of the interaction of gender and class in determining an individual's options is illustrated by studies such as Pauline Hunt's on the lives of working class couples in a mining village (Hunt 1980) or Sue Sharpe's on the attitudes and experiences of working class girls

in London. (Sharpe 1976) American research into the relationship between socio-economic status and the sex role stereotyping of children has indicated that in working class families there is more concern about differentiating the roles of girls and boys, and of women and men, than there is in middle class families. (e.g. Rabban 1950, Scanzoni 1976). Lillian Rubin in her book 'Worlds of Pain' describes how in her comparative interviews in the homes of middle class and working class families, working class boys would shake their father's hand to say good night and be reprimanded or called a sissy for crying, whereas middle class boys would generally be allowed much more expression. "Even as young as 6 or 7 the working class boys seemed more emotionally controlled - more like miniature men - than those in the middle class families" (Rubin 1976, 126). Alison Kelly's study of the parents of first year children in a British urban secondary school found that the working class parents gave significantly more traditional responses on the 'sexist' scale of her questionnaire - but as she comments, "this may represent a real difference in the way parents from different socio-economic groups think about sex roles, or it may merely indicate that middle class parents are more sensitive about expressing sentiments which could be construed as sexist". (Kelly 1981, 12)

Class status may well interact with the sex of the child, as Lambert et al discovered in their large cross-national survey of childrearing values among 800 parents of six-year-olds from ten different nationalities, all West European or North-American. In the sub-sample of English families, working class parents did expect and perceive overall more sex-role differences than did the middle class parents, but the results were compounded by the sex of the child.

"Middle class parents are generally more concerned about their daughters maintaining femininity than they are about their sons maintaining masculinity, (while) working class parents have quite a different set of norms - that their sons stay masculine rather than their daughters stay feminine".
(Lambert et al, 1979)

Their results indicate that the relationship between sex role attitudes and class, as with race, is not a simple one, and that studies of sex role stereotyping need to specify clearly the population from which their data is drawn and to avoid broad generalisations to other groups.

1.3 Evidence of Change in sex role attitudes and practices

(a) Attitudes

The preceding review of the social science literature suggests that in the 1970s and early 1980s a revaluation of traditional sex roles was taking place. Judith Bardwick, writing her book 'In Transition' in the late seventies, thought that

"by 1980, many more people will value both the feminine and the masculine qualities in themselves and in others than did in 1950 to 1965" (Bardwick 1979, 258).

Young and Willmott as early as 1973 detected a 'move towards symmetry' in the relationships of the husbands and wives they studied, and suggested that

"by the next century society will have moved from one demanding job for each spouse, through two jobs for the wife and one for the husband, to two demanding jobs for the wife and two for the husband" (Young and Willmott 1973).

Their conclusions have been criticised on the grounds that they considered only the more superficial aspects of the marital relationship, and that their data fail to justify the claims that they make (Bell and Newby 1976), but their prediction reflects the popular assumption that sex roles are becoming more egalitarian.

Surveys and polls undertaken to test this assumption, mostly in America, have provided mixed results. A large-scale 1974 Opinion Poll discovered that 50% of America's women and 48% of American men felt the most satisfying and interesting way of life to be "traditional marriage with the husband assuming the responsibility for providing for the family and the wife running the house and taking care of the children". Younger respondents were less traditional than older ones, but even then very few of those involved in the survey advocated 'equal sharing' of home and wage-earning responsibilities between men

and women, preferring 'more sharing' to the more radical option of complete equality. (Roper Organisation Inc. 1974)

More recently Herzog et al found similar, if slightly more liberal, views among the three thousand high school seniors surveyed in 1979 as part of the 'Monitoring the Future' Project (designed to monitor the lifestyles and values of American youth). When asked to rate their preference for the allocations of work and family duties within their own prospective marriages, most students favoured equal sharing of housework and childcare, but this finding was contradicted by their preference for mothers of pre-school children to stay at home, and the view expressed by virtually all students that less than fulltime employment by the husband was unacceptable. Herzog et al interpret this contradiction as indicating that although there is a tendency to favour role sharing, the responsibility for a particular duty still remains with the traditional partner - childcare with the woman, economic support of the family with the man. They noted also that male respondents were more conservative than females on sex role issues. (Herzog et al 1983)

Mason et al's analysis of five American sample surveys between 1964 and 1974 indicated "considerable changes in women's sex role attitudes since the mid 1960s"

(Mason et al 1976, 593); and Thornton and Freedman documented a "tremendous shift towards more egalitarian sex role attitudes between 1962 and 1977" in their sample of over 1,000 American women interviewed four times during this fifteen year period. However most of the surveys which document increasingly egalitarian attitudes towards sex roles add the same caveat: that the shift in attitudes is more pronounced among women than men, and that it is a shift towards favouring equality of opportunity in the labour market and political arena rather than advocating personal changes in the way that men and women relate to each other within the family. The "tremendous shift in attitudes" reported by Thornton and Freedman was "considerably more pronounced for the global items concerned with the general principles of role segregation and division of authority within the home than for more specific aspects of role segregation such as the sharing of housework or the legitimacy of non-home activities for mothers" (p840). Mason et al also qualify their finding by adding that 'the traditional sex division of labour within the family continues to receive more support than do inequalities in the labour market rights of the sexes'. (Mason et al 1976) Scandinavian researchers had reached a similar conclusion some years earlier. The author of one Finnish survey concluded that "popular movements like the current sex role debate seem to have an effect on

general public opinion, but deeper attitudes and behaviour may be more difficult to change" (Haavio-Mannila 1972).

There are few British surveys of attitudes to sex roles. The National Opinion Poll conducted in 1976 found that over half the population agreed in principle with the government's attempts to impose equal opportunity through legislation, but asked no detailed questions to probe how far that 'agreement in principle' might hold in specific instances of inequality. The large-scale study by the EEC on "the changing roles of men and women" in its nine member countries includes data on Britain. Although most of the men surveyed appeared prepared to 'help out' with domestic work, the survey found little fundamental change in attitudes to sex roles and concluded that:

"Both sexes appear to have the same, highly stereotyped image of their respective roles. It may be alright for a man to help with the shopping or the washing up, or even organise a meal or clean the house. But few accept that he should stay at home to take care of a sick child, change a baby's nappy or do the ironing".
(E.E.C. 1979, 113)

(b) Practice

Since these are the attitudes that people put forward in surveys, it is not surprising that most of the studies investigating how men and women divide childcare, housework and paid employment responsibilities between them in practice have found strong adherence to traditional sex role stereotypes. Although data on sex role attitudes

may be scarce for Britain, there are a number of studies which have investigated the actual division of labour within families. The 'Women at Work' Survey conducted by the National Opinion Polls in 1977 on behalf of the Sunday Times found "little evidence of the much-heralded shift to symmetrical families" among its quota sample of 422 working wives, 393 non-working wives and 412 married men. Ten per cent of husbands regularly looked after their children while their wives were at work, but "an overwhelming majority of men take it for granted that wives, even working wives, take the main brunt of housework and child care". Ann Oakley, asking 'are husbands good housewives?' came to a similar conclusion after interviewing forty randomly-selected London mothers.

"Only a minority of husbands give the kind of help that assertions of equality in modern marriage imply . . . The men seem to avoid all but the sheerly pleasurable aspects of childcare. The physical side, like the bulk of the housework, is in most cases avoided". (Oakley, 1972)

Steve Edgell, on the basis of his study of thirty-eight middle-class couples, claimed that "marital relationships remain highly segregated, unequal and husband-dominated" (Edgell 1980, 104). Gaynor Cohen in her study of life on a middle-class housing estate found fathers taking a very limited share in the upbringing of their children. Thirty of the forty-two fathers she interviewed hardly saw their children and many were frequently away from home at weekends (Cohen 1977). Kathryn Backett likewise concluded from her interviews with twenty-two families defined as middle-class and contacted via play leaders, that although both husbands and wives sustained a belief

in active fathering and the sharing of household tasks, in practice this amounted to fathers 'helping out' occasionally, and Backett remarked that "equal parenthood was far from being achieved" (Backett 1982, 228). In Alison Kelly's survey of eleven-year-olds and their parents in a secondary school in Manchester, over 80% of the pupils reported that their mothers 'regularly' did the shopping, cooking, cleaning and laundry (even though a high proportion of the women worked outside the home), whereas only 4% of the fathers regularly washed clothes, and 8% regularly cleaned the house. She concluded that "although they (the parents) say that men should share the housework, especially when their wives are working, very few of these families seem to practise what they preach". (Kelly, 1981, 16).

Even in the 'dual-career' families described by the Rapaports and others (Rapaport and Rapaport 1971, Holmstrom 1972, Poloma and Garland 1971), sex roles have changed less than it would first appear. Although the women are in prestigious full time paid employment, most of the studies showed that when both partners wanted a career and a relationship, most of the accommodation fell on the woman. She was still mainly responsible for the household maintenance and childcare. A comparison of the 'diaries' kept by one of the couples in the Rapaport's book is

revealing. Mrs Benson's account of a working week is interspersed with entries such as:

"Vegetable order, day's laundry, unload dishwasher, put toys away, remind son of time, stitch up nightdress, cut daughter's hair, look for lost dresses, shopping in the rain, iron doll's clothes made for daughter's birthday, sew button on, feed turtles . . ."

Such distractions are noticeably absent from Mr Benson's record of his working day. (p.100-106) The major contribution that men in these marriages appeared to make was to approve of their wives working (provided her work did not become as demanding as his) and to approve of the use of outside help.

The Newsons writing in 1965 about the role of fathers in the seven hundred Nottingham families they studied containing a four-year-old child, thought that

"there is a great deal of evidence to suggest that the traditional pattern of family life is changing" (p.133) and that "the willingness of so many fathers to participate actively in looking after such young children is we believe a very distinctive feature of modern family life in England".
(Newson and Newson 1965).

These fathers may well have been more involved in the care of their children than were previous generations of fathers, but their 'active participation' still had its limits, as the Newsons went on to report two pages later.

"Some of the activities of childcare were more popular than others with the fathers. Whereas

80% were prepared to get the baby to sleep for instance, only 57% ever changed a nappy and still fewer (39%) ever gave him his bath."
(p.135)

Even so, these levels of participation surpassed that of the fathers in the Gallup Poll commissioned by Woman's Own Magazine in 1978, over a decade later. The Poll surveyed a thousand mothers with children under sixteen, interviewing over half of them, and discovered that

"One in six husbands has never looked after his child on his own. One quarter have never put their child to bed. One in three never even read to their own children . . . wives are left to shoulder the overwhelming majority of work involved in being a parent". (Woman's Own, 1979, 23)

Research in other English-speaking countries presents a similar picture. In Russell's detailed time-budget study, Australian fathers were much more likely to play with their children than to be involved in their day-to-day care. They averaged only three hours per week on the latter (for parents with a child under five) compared to the seventeen hours per week put in by mothers (Russell, 1978).

Booth and Edwards, in their investigation of the father's role in a sample of 231 American two-parent families, did not even look at the father's behaviour in terms of physical caretaking, instead assessing their participation in terms of the categories of praising, punishing and playing with the child. Their conclusion thus appears unwarranted, that father's interest in their children is

grossly underestimated and that they participate in childcare as much or even more than mothers - especially as their conclusion is based on disregarding for the analysis the time that the father spends at work, since "without taking into account the amount of time each parent has available to interact with the child, the comparison is unfair" (Booth and Edwards 1980, 451). Presumably including a measure of physical caretaking in their analysis of fathers' participation in childcare would also be 'unfair'. Other studies, like Russel's and Oakley's (op cit) have demonstrated that when fathers are involved with their children, it is generally in what Oakley refers to as 'the pleasurable aspects' rather than 'the physical side' of childcare.

The evidence, then, suggests that in practice the traditional pattern of the man as wage-earner and the woman as responsible for home and children has so far changed much less than the widespread acceptance of an egalitarian sex role ideology might suggest. Laurie Davidson and Laura Gordon in 'The Sociology of Gender' neatly sum up the changes that have taken place as "an increased acceptance of the husband sometimes helping his wife in the performance of what are still viewed as her responsibilities" (Davidson and Gordon 1979, 54). And as far as changes in women's participation in the

labour market are concerned, although women's employment has risen steadily (until 1980 at least), the work women do is still overwhelmingly concentrated in the lower-paid, lower-status jobs, often part-time and with little job security. They tend to work in traditionally 'female' sectors of the employment market. Three-quarters are in the service industries (shops, cafés, hairdressers, hospitals, schools, offices), another fifth in manufacturing, mainly the clothing and footwear industries. In 1980 working women earned an average of only 72% of men's wages, and that figure underestimates the imbalance since it excludes the large proportion of women who work part-time - 67% of the female work force in 1978, compared to only 6% of the male work force. (Women in the '80s, C.I.S. Report, 1981)

Women's work generally has to be fitted around the demands of housework and childcare, and often entails their working a 'double shift' rather than their partners altering their work patterns or doing significantly more of the work around the house. Several time-budget studies have shown that when their wives work, the average participation by men in housework increases by only six or seven minutes per week. (Meissner et al 1975 in Canada, Derow 1981 in Britain) Even in Sweden, renowned for its progressive legislation on sexual equality, a study of housework by the Central Bureau of Statistics found that in families

where both husband and wife were employed fulltime, 67% of the women did all or practically all of the cooking, 50% did all or practically all of the washing up, 80% did all of the laundry, 53% did all or practically all of the shopping and 55% did all of the cleaning (Ericsson 1976). It appears as though Young and Willmott's symmetrical family remained, at the end of the seventies, in the distinctly asymmetrical stage of "two jobs for the wife and one for the husband".

1.4 Childrearing advice, attitudes and practice

This section draws on several different sources of information to build up a picture of how current child-rearing attitudes and practices have been affected by the shift in sex role values described in the previous sections. One source is an analysis of the kind of advice offered to parents in childrearing manuals, which "provide an authoritative source of information for non-professionals as well as for childcare specialists" (Klapper 1971, 726). Another is the surveys which have been undertaken (unfortunately very limited in number) to investigate the attitudes people hold about how girls and boys should be brought up in present day society. A third is observation of actual parent-child interaction, either in laboratory situations or in everyday life. I shall review these three sources of data separately.

(a) The 'Experts' advice

Various studies have documented the sex role stereotyping apparent in parenting manuals up to 1974 (Klapper 1971, De Frain 1977). Their tone is reflected in the kind of advice given to fathers by Fitzhugh Dodson in 1970 to "play a crucial role in giving pre-school boys the physical interaction and rough-housing they need, and display the tenderness and softness a little girl needs to encourage her coquettishness and femininity" (Dodson 1970, 179). Or the reassurance offered by Dr Spock in

1968, that "of course, I don't mean that the father has to give just as many bottles or change just as many diapers as the mother, but its fine for him to do these things occasionally". (Spock 1968, 30-31)

There are signs that this unquestioning acceptance of traditional sex roles is altering. Spock in his more recent work has taken heed of feminist criticisms. He stated the main reason for a third revision of 'Baby and Child Care' to be 'to eliminate the sexist biases of the sort that help to create and perpetuate discrimination against girls and women". A comparison of the 1968 and 1976 American editions of his book indicate a definite attempt to present less stereotyped images, for instance in these two descriptions of the father-daughter relationship:

1968: She gains confidence in herself as a girl and a woman from feeling his approval. I'm thinking of little things he can do like complimenting her on her dress, or hair-do, or the cookies she's made (p.321).

1976: She gains confidence in herself as a girl and a woman from feeling his approval. In order not to feel inferior to boys she should believe that her father would welcome her in backyard sports, on fishing and camping trips, in attendance at ball games . . . She gains confidence in herself from feeling his interest in her activities, achievements, opinions and aspirations (p.357).

In the 1979 British edition, Spock goes further and leaves out this description of 'masculine' activities which fathers might do with their daughters, saying instead only that

'children gain trust in themselves from being respected as human beings' (p.62), and stressing that both parents should share all aspects of childcare and housework.

Several popular childrearing books have also appeared on the American market with a specifically non-sexist bias. (Carmichael 1977, Greenberg 1978, Pogrebin 1980). In order to assess how far this was a general trend in the advice offered by the childrearing 'experts' I analysed the 23 books addressed to parents which were published in Britain in 1979 and 1980 (Appendix 1). There seemed to be a fairly widespread acceptance of the need for boys and girls to have similar experiences and opportunities and for both sexes to be allowed to dress up, join in domestic chores, be given dolls, etc. (although some books avoided addressing the issue explicitly by simply removing all references to the sex of the child). The majority of the books unquestioningly assumed however that the mother would remain the child's main caretaker, even those especially written for fathers. (Rakowitz and Rubin was a notable exception, and Brazelton did include as one of his hypothetical case-study families a couple who were trying to share equally the care of their daughter.) Any change in sex role expectations is at the level of the child's behaviour, rather than in the models that the parents will provide. Fathers

can - indeed, should - 'help' with childcare, but children are still a mother's responsibility. As Sylvia Close puts it in 'The Toddler and the New Baby', "the mother is the pivot in any family with young children". Penelope Leach nicely illustrates this distinction between child and adult sex roles in two of her books published in 1979. In 'Baby and Child Care from Birth to age Five' she is quite clear that children should not be restricted to certain activities because of their sex.

"Children are human beings who happen to be either male or female. They should clearly have the opportunity of exploring all aspects of human behaviour as children . . . your child's eventual sexual predilections will not be changed by swapping roles in childhood . . . If you try to make the child stick to the 'right' sex, you deprive him or her of half the world". (p.433)

Depriving adults of half the world seems to be less of a problem, however, since in another book published in the same year, she argues that mothers should stay home with their children for the first five years, and that

"Fathers are not mothers . . . expecting them to fit the role of pseudo- or apprentice-mothers can only detract from their real roles as fathers . . . children come in two sexually-different models and they need two sexually-differentiated parents". ('Who Cares', 1979, 156)

Peter and Elizabeth Fenwick also feel that

"the merging of male and female roles may not always operate to the advantage of the child. For him, the ideal situation is still that of two people playing different but equally important roles" (Fenwick and Fenwick 1979, 3).

Later on, it appears that the essence of the father's 'different role' is to "introduce a little harsh reality into his children's life", to "test their physical limits", and to "stretch their mental horizons in a way which mother, simply because she is swamped with the details of physical care, sometimes fails to do" (p.185).

Even those authors who do make a deliberate attempt to avoid sex-stereotyping by using such terms as he/she and 'parent' or 'spouse' rather than 'mother', nevertheless often reveal stereotyped assumptions in the examples they provide, and in the illustrations. Boys get tickets to football matches, girls go to parties; problems to be dealt with in boys include fighting and not doing home-work, in girls they are not being co-operative and staying out late (Fine). Fathers are shown coming home from work, big sisters are worried about spoiling hair-dos, and boys try to be 'as strong as father', girls 'as beautiful as mother'. (Gold and Eisen)

In summary, the analysis of child advice manuals published in 1979 and 1980 suggests that although there is a reduced emphasis on the differential treatment of the sexes especially in the case of young children, the assumption remains that women are primary caretakers, and that men are primary wage-earners with a limited role to play in the physical care of their children.

(b) Surveys of Attitudes

It is difficult to discover how far the covert and overt messages in these childrearing manuals reflect the values people actually hold about how girls and boys should be brought up, since there are few large-scale, detailed studies of childrearing that would permit us to say whether or not parents do hold similar expectations for girls and boys and provide them with similar experiences and opportunities, in early childhood at least. Maccoby and Jacklin in their review of studies of differential parental attitudes and behaviour towards sons and daughters, concluded that there were few consistent differences in sex role socialisation (Maccoby and Jacklin 1975). However, Jeanne Block's extensive cross-cultural survey of parents' childrearing orientations, values and techniques came to the conclusion that there was "considerably more evidence of differences in parental rearing practices as a function of the sex of the child than is reported or summarised by Maccoby and Jacklin" (Block 1978, 82). Block found that both mothers and fathers emphasised achievement, competition and independence for their sons, encouraged them to control their emotions and were concerned that they make a good impression on others. Daughters were subjected to more restrictions and supervision, especially by mothers, were expected to behave in a 'ladylike' manner and encouraged to be more introspective than sons.

Block explains her differing conclusion in terms of the greater consistency of her data (the same childrearing inventory was administered to all of the subjects in her sample; 696 mothers and 548 fathers plus 1227 college students reporting their own parents' practices, from a variety of socio-economic, ethnic and cultural backgrounds), and also in terms of the inclusion of fathers and the greater average age of the children in her survey. Another suggested reason is the fact that many of the studies summarised by Maccoby and Jacklin used broad, global categories of childrearing behaviour, whereas the concepts in Block's CRPI (Childrearing Practices Inventory) were more differentiated and specific. Support for this suggestion is provided by the work of researchers who have asked both general and specific questions, for instance the Swedish survey carried out by Brun-Gulbrandsen in the 1960s. He found that although more than 95% of the mothers of 7 to 11 year olds he surveyed said, in line with Sweden's emerging national ideology, that they thought boys and girls ought to be brought up in as similar a manner as possible, they were less unanimous when questioned in more detail. A quarters of the mothers then didn't think that girls and boys should help equally with the housework. They thought it was more important for girls to learn housekeeping skills, and boys to have more carpentry instruction. (Brun-Gulbrandsen 1971) Similarly, though many parents

would say young children should have the same kind of toys, the detailed specific questionnaire on doll-play administered to the parents of over two hundred children in French nursery classes revealed that as many as 85% reported that their sons 'never' played with dolls, while the question asking 'has your child a lot of dolls'? was deemed irrelevant by most parents of boys and crossed out. (Piron 1976)

Block's research is unusual in combining a large-scale survey with detailed specific questions about childrearing. Most surveys elicit general attitudes rather than attitudes towards specific behaviours, so the following findings should probably be interpreted as over-estimating the extent to which parents are in fact aiming to treat their sons and daughters similarly.

As with studies of adult sex roles, most of the reports come from the USA. The General Mills American Family Report, a survey of over a thousand families with children under thirteen conducted in 1976-7, found that 57% of its parents could be classified as 'traditionalists', who upheld the value of religion, marriage and patriotism and thought boys and girls should be treated differently, while 43% were described as 'new breed' parents, who were more permissive and egalitarian in their values, and believed girls and boys should be raised alike (although

in practice the report notes that in these families too, it was "mostly still the mother who is responsible for the house, the cooking, the shopping and the care of the children".) (General Mills American Family Report 1976) Charles Thrall, in a 1978 interview study of ninety-nine American nuclear families with between two and four school-age children, concluded that "most families continue to be quite traditional in their pattern, with a strong emphasis on the division of labour by sex for both parents and children" (Thrall 1978, 249).

Families who have attempted to break away from the traditional two-parent nuclear family could be expected to be more likely to socialise their children in new and different ways. A detailed longitudinal study of one hundred and fifty young American parents who were living in single-mother households, in groups or communities or deliberately unwed (plus fifty 'control' sets of parents in nuclear families), addressed as one of its areas of investigation "the extent to which sex roles of parents and children growing up in today's world are changing in the direction of more sex role egalitarianism". The answer, when the children were two, was "only to a limited extent". Children were dressed alike and there were few observed differences in the parent's behaviour towards boys and girls, but on the basis of their

interview data the investigators predicted that this would change as the children passed three, and they noted that the roles the parents took were still fairly traditional, with mothers more responsible for childcare and fathers for "earning the bread", even in those families committed to greater sexual equality. (Eiduson 1978) Lois Hoffman, having reviewed the demographic changes such as smaller family size, longer life expectancy and increased female employment which, she suggests, should lead to changes in the sex role socialisation of children to reflect the greater similarity in adult roles, goes on to conclude from her review of the American literature that there is a lag in parents' practice.

"Even when parents finally realise that it is a new world, their childrearing behaviour is only partly responsive to the new world's demands, and it continues to be influenced by the style of parenting that their parents used."
(Hoffman 1977, 655)

The main source of British data on attitudes to child rearing is the Newsons' Nottingham study, based on detailed interviews with the mothers of seven hundred children starting when they were aged four. Although the information on young children is fairly dated now, having been obtained in the early 1960s, and is based on interviews with mothers only, the study nevertheless provides a rich and detailed source of information. The longitudinal element in this research enabled the Newsons to discover

that mothers became much more concerned that their children conform to traditional sex role stereotypes as they grew older. When the children were one and four, differences in the way mothers reported treating boys and girls were fairly minimal, but by the time their children were eleven years old, most mothers expressed a great deal of concern to maintain traditional gender stereotypes. Although they would generally defend their child's right to engage in 'non-traditional' behaviour as an individual, they definitely had a notion of what was appropriate for girls and boys and were "somewhat self-conscious or defensive" if their child failed to conform to these stereotypes. They saw boys as "rough outdoor types, often grubby and careless of their physical appearance, interested in building, carpentry or mechanical model-making or in pursuing technological hobbies like chemistry or electronics", and girls as "following indoor pursuits, interested in making and exchanging gifts, writing stories, and letters, buying or making clothes, keen on acting, dancing and so on". They encouraged a traditional division of household chores, with girls doing indoor housework-type jobs and boys dirty or outside jobs and errands, and generally subjected girls to more 'chaperonage' and restrictions than boys. (Newson et al 1978, 32) Block's survey,

which included data from a British subsample, likewise found that the extent to which parents socialised their sons and daughters differently increased as a function of the child's age, reaching a peak during high school years. (Block 1978)

(c) Observation of Parent-child Interaction

Although the ideology of equal treatment for boys and girls seems to be fairly widely accepted, for young, pre-school children anyway, several studies which have looked at how babies and toddlers are actually treated have come up with slightly different results. Moss observed mothers with their young babies, and found that boy babies tended to be handled and stimulated more, while girl babies were talked to more often and encouraged to smile more. (Moss 1973) Girls are given what Lewis terms 'proximal' rather than 'distal' stimulation; they receive attention by staying close to their mothers while boys are attended to when they are off exploring (Lewis 1972). (Other studies have found similar results in primary school classrooms (Serbin et al 1973, Perdue and Connor 1978)). One analysis of parent-child interaction found that parents interrupted girls twice as often as boys (and fathers interrupted children of both sexes more than mothers did). Although the researcher did not investigate the meanings that parents themselves attached to these

interruptions, she suggests that they provide an index of relative power and importance, and that daughters, who are interrupted more often, are therefore learning that their opinions are less worthy of serious attention. (Grief, 1980) When the differences in behaviour towards girls and boys are on this more subtle level, few parents are aware that they are actually discriminating. Beverley Fagot, a prolific investigator of sex differences in adults' behaviour towards children, found that boys are left alone more often "even when parents have no conscious desire to give boys more freedom than girls" (Fagot 1974, 558) In a later study, although most of the twenty four sets of middle-class parents she observed with their toddler child said they wouldn't treat such young girls and boys differently, they in fact responded more positively to daughters than to sons when they made requests for help, and to sons than daughters when they engaged in behaviour categorized as 'manipulating objects'. Fagot concludes that "these differences in reaction are not surprising for they fit sex differences in interests which appear in older children, but parents of young children do not appear to be aware of these differential contingencies" (Fagot 1978, 465).

It is not simply that parents are reacting to 'natural' differences between boys and girls either, as various

experimental studies have shown. When adults are asked to assess the personality of a child they have just seen on a videotape, or to interact with a baby in a room full of toys, their behaviour differs depending on whether they are told the child is a girl or a boy. Mothers who were told that 6-month-old Beth was a girl tended to smile at her more and to offer her dolls to play with. Those who were told that the same child was a boy called Adam were more likely to offer him a train. (Will, Self and Datan 1976) A replication of this study by Caroline Smith and Barbara Lloyd at Sussex University, using four 'actor babies', found that mothers chose toys appropriate for the sex they believed the child to be and encouraged the 'boys' more in gross motor activity. (Smith and Lloyd, 1978) Other researchers have found similar results with a three-month-old 'Baby X' (Seavey et al 1975, replicated by Sidorowicz and Lunney in 1980) and with fourteen-month-old infants playing with adult strangers (Frisch 1977). Another study in which students were shown a videotape of a nine-month-old baby found that when the child cried, the observers saw this as a sign of anger when they thought the child was a boy, but a sign of fear when they thought that they were watching a girl (Condry and Condry 1974). These differences appear early. Rubin et al asked parents to describe their newborn baby when the child was less than a day old, and discovered that they

were more likely to describe daughters as 'little', 'pretty', 'beatiful' and 'cute', while their sons were firmer, better co-ordinated, stronger and bigger. The researchers concluded that these differences were 'in the eye of the beholder', since the girl and boy babies did not differ overall in size, weight or reflex responses (Rubin et al 1974). It is not just the parents whose perceptions are biased by the sex of the child. One analysis of the words used by medical personnel attending the deliveries of babies indicated that they too have a tendency to describe newborn males to their parents as 'sturdy, handsome, big and tough', and newborn females as 'dainty, delicate, sweet and charming', despite controls on the size and birth weight of the infants (Hansen 1980). In all these studies the child's behaviour was the same, it was the adult's interpretation of it which varied according to the child's sex. When asked, most of the adults said they didn't treat boys and girls differently, or that they were responding to the characteristics of a particular child. The middle-class academic parents of one to six year olds in Rheingold and Cook's study of children's rooms, for example, said that they were guided by their children's interests in furnishing their rooms and providing them with toys. Nevertheless their rooms "closely resembled the rooms of boys and girls pictured in mail-order

catalogs" (p.463), with the boy's rooms decorated with animal furnishings and containing sports equipment, spatial/mechanical toys and educational materials, while the girls' rooms were decorated with frills and ruffles and contained a preponderance of dolls. The authors concluded that parents "surround children with sex-typed things long before they are old enough to have developed interests". (Rheingold and Cook 1975)

This review of the literature on childrearing advice, attitudes and practice therefore suggests that there is a definite trend, evident in both the 'experts' advice and in survey data, towards thinking that young children should be treated alike regardless of their sex. However, detailed questioning often reveals that this general approval of sex role flexibility breaks down in more specific cases of sex role stereotyping and furthermore that when observed actually interacting with small children, parents often treat boys and girls differently without being aware of doing so. The conclusion reached by Lois Hoffman in 1977 still appears to hold true, that:

"We are still finding sex differences, and we are still finding sex-based differences in socialisation practices" (Hoffman 1977, 655).

1.5 Structural Barriers to Sex Role Change

Whilst some researchers have sought to document changes in sex role attitudes and behaviours, others have investigated ways in which the organisation of society might hinder or facilitate such changes. Gail Zellman has defined structural barriers as 'organisational and institutional patterns, practices, rules and norms which effectively hinder or halt women in their efforts to enter, remain or advance in institutions' (Zellman 1976, 36). (They also effectively hinder or halt men's efforts to share domestic work or childcare, but the focus in Zellman's article was on the institutional participation of women).

The kind of barriers which have been investigated include the lack of adequate childcare facilities, the subordinate position of women in the labour market, and the 'masculine' values of paid employment such as competitiveness, aggressiveness, independence and rationality (Hochschild 1975, Zellman 1976, Pleck 1976). The contributors to Moss and Fonda's book on work and the family stress the need for both increased childcare provision and changes in employment conditions and practices in order to permit greater sex role flexibility for both men and women. They suggest the following prerequisites for sexual equality at work and in the home: reasonably-paid, conveniently located, good-quality childcare facilities,

paid leave for family responsibilities (such as children being ill), paternity leave to balance the present maternity leave (with both eventually replaced by parental leave, as in Sweden), full job protection including seniority and pension rights during this period, more flexible working hours, and increased opportunities for part-time work at all levels of employment and in all types of occupation (Moss and Fonda 1980). Other authors have variously proposed parent education courses for both sexes, more training opportunities for women, an acceptance of alternating periods of study, homemaking/childcare and employment as a normal pattern, social security provision which is not based on the assumption that family members will support each other, income tax deductions for childcare or adequate childcare allowances, and the provision of collective kitchen and maintenance services (Cogwell and Sussman 1972, Kantner 1977, Barrett and McIntosh 1982).

Many researchers cite Sweden as a society that has gone a long way towards restructuring employment to enable work and family roles to be more easily combined by both parents (although there is some evidence that public practice and attitudes lag behind the official ideology, e.g. Keyfetz 1978, Scott 1982). Either parent is entitled to nine months postnatal leave on 90% of their earnings,

and to time off for parental duties (clinics, nursery visits, sick children), also at 90% of their pay. Parents of children under eight can work a shorter, six-hour day (Scott 1982). Daycare provision has expanded and various alternative schemes have been introduced especially in the cities, such as the 'three-family' system whereby a trained caretaker (still usually a woman) will be provided to supervise the children of three families in each of their homes in turn, at the same cost as a place in a state nursery. (Berfenstam and William-Olsson 1973, 75)

In Britain, the evidence suggests that structural factors such as the lack of childcare facilities and discrimination against women in the workplace operate to maintain traditional sex roles. In the 1976 General Household survey, 38% of under-fives in the U.K. were reported to be in some form of daycare, but much of the provision (nursery classes, pre-school playgroups) was part time and did not cover a normal working day, and not all of it was provided by the state (in fact less than half; 58% of children were in private or voluntary-run provision, with around 50,000 catered for by childminders, and only 1% of under-fives had places in local authority day nurseries). Recent cuts have reduced places even further. Facilities for the care of school-age children during working hours are also inadequate. Of the women interviewed

in the Gallup Poll survey for Woman's Own magazine, only one in fifty of mothers in paid employment was able to get her child into a holiday playscheme. One in four used friends and relatives (the arrangements often broke down) and one in five regularly had to leave children under eleven at home unsupervised. Fathers were not seen as responsible for childcare arrangements, and it was the women's jobs which were fitted around the demands of caring for children, so the survey not surprisingly found that mothers held the lowest-paid and lowest-status work (Woman's Own 1979).

Margaret Bone's study of pre-school children and their need for day care found that nearly two-thirds of mothers of under-fives would like to share the task of childcaring with someone else, but the facilities were not available. (Bone 1977) The Central Policy Review Staff's examination of services for young children with working mothers showed that in 1976 not only was there inadequate provision for pre-schoolers but that for a further three-and-a-half million primary school children with employed mothers there was virtually no provision made out of school hours (Central Policy Review 1978). Childcare is still treated, in C. Wright-Mill's terms:

"as a private trouble rather than a public issue, as if the need for childcare were a unique need

of that family rather than a structural feature of societies in which parents' economic productivity takes place away from home, in locations unsuitable for small children". (Wright-Mills 1959).

Not only is it a private trouble of parents, in most cases it also appears to be the private trouble of one half of those parents, the mothers.

1.6 Summary

This review of the literature on changing sex roles provides a background against which to view the ideas and practices of consciously non-sexist parents. At the level of equality of opportunity and equal rights, there appears to be an increasing acceptance of change in the traditional roles of women and men, particularly among younger people and the middle classes. But there seems to be little structural support (such as adequate childcare provision, equal training opportunities, job flexibility) to enable these changes to be implemented, and far less support for re-organization within individuals' personal lives despite the current upsurge of books and articles documenting the restrictive aspects of traditional sex roles. Women still bear the major responsibility for housework and childcare (with fathers increasingly taking on a share of the more rewarding aspects of the latter). As far as child sex roles are concerned, there is a growing awareness, reflected in

childrearing advice manuals and particularly in the views of middle class parents, that boys and girls might benefit from being treated similarly and having access to toys and behaviours normally reserved for the other sex. In practice though, most parents' behaviour still seems to be fairly differentiated according to the child's sex. (The concern has been with young children; most of the research in this area and almost all of the parent manuals deal with children under school age. Studies of sex-stereotyping in relation to older children have tended to concentrate on their school rather than their home experiences.) The question of how a non-sexist upbringing might be conceptualised by parents who have made these ideas an important part of their childrearing philosophy, and how they have experienced implementing their views in a society which is still organized around traditional sex roles, is however an area which has not yet been investigated, and one which is explored in this thesis.

CHAPTER TWO

Theories of Sex Role Learning

2.0 Introduction

The review of the literature in the previous chapter documented the nature and extent of current sex role stereotypes in order to provide a context for the views of the parents in this project. The second body of literature relevant to a study of non traditional sex role socialisation is the theoretical material that attempts to describe how such sex roles are learnt. The following chapter reviews the three main theories and considers the kind of evidence that has been used to support each position.

2.1 Terminology

The terminology in this area is bedevilled with inconsistencies and confusions, as various social scientists have pointed out (Graham and Stark-Adamec 1980, Henry 1979). However, to attempt to use a completely consistent set of terms would involve creating a terminology of my own which, by co-existing with terms widely used and understood at present, would probably create more confusion, not less. So I have followed established usage of the terms 'gender identity', 'sex role' and 'sexual orientation', pointing out ambiguities where there seemed a danger of misunderstanding.

Gender identity, in this thesis, is the sense of being a girl or a boy, a woman or a man - or as Money and Erhardt define it, "the sameness, unity and persistence of one's individuality as male or female" (Money and Erhardt 1972). Sex role is the package of behaviours, attitudes, rights and responsibilities which in a particular culture are seen as linked to that identity, and which are often described as 'masculine' and feminine'. Sexual orientation refers to a person's choice of sexual partner; homosexual, bisexual or heterosexual. There is considerable agreement in the literature that sexual identity involves these three components, although there is far less agreement over the terms to be used to describe them. Sandra Bem labels the three components, gender identity ("a secure sense of one's maleness or femaleness"), sex role identity (Masculinity or femininity) and sexual preference (Bem 1976). Green uses slightly different terminology for what seems to be the same division; he refers to core-morphologic identity ("an individual's earliest self-awareness of belonging to one of two categories of human beings"): gender-role behaviour ("those behaviours which are sexually dimorphic - 'masculine' and feminine') and sexual orientation ("the anatomy of one's preferred sexual partner") (Green 1975) Dr Spock, in 'Bringing up Children in a Difficult Time'

says that a child must develop a 'sex identity' for psychological well-being, and although it is not clear whether he is referring to sexual orientation or gender identity in the sense described above, he is obviously distinguishing this 'sex identity' from sex role, for he writes that 'after further soul-searching, I don't think it needs to be built through an emphasis on differences in clothes or playthings, or on parental reminders of what little boys are meant to do and what little girls are meant to do" (Spock 1974).

As an example of the kind of ambiguities referred to earlier, several theorists have objected to the term 'sex roles' in the sense in which it is used above. They argue that this perpetuates misconceptions about the relationship between biological and social influences, since 'sex' is usually used to refer to behaviour determined by biological and physiological factors and 'gender' to those aspects determined by psychological and socio-cultural factors. However since the terms 'sex role' and 'sex role stereotyping' are so widely used and understood, I have chosen to use these terms rather than to introduce competing and possibly confusing terminology.

2.2 Psychoanalytic Theory

For Freud, the link between gender identity and sex role

was provided by the process of unconscious and semi-conscious fantasy. He postulated that very young children of both sexes identify with their primary parent (which he assumed to be their mother). He suggested that when children are about four years old, they become aware of genital differences and their identification experiences then begin to diverge, resulting in different personality structures for females and males. Freud argued that the boy's awareness of possessing a penis initiates the Oedipus complex, whereby the boy desires his mother sexually and resents and fears his father as a rival. This leads to a fear of retaliation by the father, which takes the form of castration anxiety. This is resolved by the boy's relinquishing, through repression, all desires for the mother and identifying instead with the father. In psychoanalytic terms, 'object choice' (wanting someone) is replaced by 'object identity' (wanting to be like someone). By identifying with their fathers, boys obtain their mothers vicariously. Through identification they assume the values and role behaviours of their fathers.

Freud described the girl as undergoing a different set of fantasy experiences. Around the age of four she

becomes aware that she does not have a penis, recognises that her mother shares the same fate, and blames her for her disadvantaged condition. Freud argued that this leads her to reject her mother as a love object and to turn instead to her father. When she realises the futility of seeing her father as a love object and its threat to her mother's attitude towards her, she identifies again with her mother. Girls thus retain their original identification with their mother (in Freud's terms, an 'anaclitic' identification based in fear of the loss of love) whereas boys develop an identification with their father based on fear of retaliation (a 'defensive' identification). The assumption that the girl does not have an experience comparable to the boy's resolution of the Oedipal complex was used by Freud to argue that women would therefore develop weaker consciences (super-egos).

Freud's theory is based on the anatomical distinction between the sexes. Ann Oakley succinctly summarises the importance of genital differences in psychoanalytic theory as follows: "The discovery of the missing penis is the event that, in a complex series of stages, determines the feminine character with its three special qualities of masochism (a permanent sense of being castrated), passivity (the reluctant acceptance of the clitoris as an

inadequate substitute for the penis) and narcissism (women's overvaluation of their physical charms as compensation for their inferior genital equipment)". (Oakley 1981, 98)

Other psychoanalytic theorists such as Erikson have also stressed the biological determinants of the 'masculine' and 'feminine' personality (Erikson 1964, 1968). Based on his observations of the play constructions of twelve-year-old children, where girls created interior scenes while boys built exterior scenes involving elaborate walls and high towers, Erikson suggested that the possession of a male or female sexual organ leads to different personalities and ways of relating to the world for men and women. The external, intrusive nature of the penis, he argued, gives men an active pragmatic orientation ("outer space") while the internal, expectant reproduction system of the woman causes her to develop a gentle, peaceful, static orientation ("inner space") just right for mothering.

"The identity formation of women differs by dint of the fact that their somatic design harbours an 'inner space' destined to bear offspring of chosen men and, with it, a biological, psychological and ethical commitment to take care of human infancy" (Erikson, 1968, 266).

Although his findings could equally well be interpreted as reflecting the child's awareness of the roles women and men are expected to fulfil, Erikson prefers the anatomical analogy.

Although Freud provided many insights into the complicated nature of the parent-child relationship, there are many gaps and inadequacies in his theory. The masculine bias has been documented by many writers, including Freud's contemporaries. Karen Horney, for instance, showed how Freud's theory of gender identity development directly parallels small boys' ideas about gender, in its assumption that the presence or 'loss' of a penis is the critical factor in such development (Horney 1967). Freud wrote that gender identity originated with the discovery of the genitals at age four or five, and that only after this did environmental factors have any effect. Yet according to existing evidence, gender identity is largely developed by the age of two, coinciding with the development of conceptual language, and it is very difficult to successfully re-assign the child to the other sex after this age (Money and Erhardt 1972). Kohlberg's research also indicates that children are already sex-typed in their behaviour at an age when, according to Freud, both boys and girls are still identified with their mother, and that they do not have

clear ideas about genital differences until after they have developed a gender identity (Kohlberg 1966). Much of Freud's work is 'culture-blind' and ignores the context within which the psychodynamic processes he describes are taking place. Other psychoanalytic theorists, for example, have pointed out that in a male-dominated society it could well be the male's power and prestige, rather than his penis, which the girl envies (Stockard and Johnson 1979).

Psychoanalytic theory has also been criticised on the grounds of the 'unscientific' nature of its evidence. Psychoanalysis concentrates on unconscious mental processes, feelings and psychic structures, and develops its insights through interpreting the talk (or play, in the case of children) of people in the analytic situation. There have been attempts particularly in America to argue for psychoanalysis as a science in behaviouristic terms, broadening the definition of behaviour to include feelings and thoughts as 'latent behaviour' (e.g. Rapaport 1960), but psychoanalysts more usually reject such criticism by arguing that their methods are the best way of understanding the kind of phenomena in which they are interested. Nancy Chodorow takes the position that "the strength of psychoanalysis is as an interpretative theory and not as

a behavioural science (1978, 41), and Erich Fromm, writing about 'the problems of scientific truth', suggests that human reason, interpretation and imagination are necessary "to penetrate the deceptive surfaces of the phenomena and arrive at hypotheses that deal with the underlying focus rather than the surface" (Fromm 1982, 11).

It is not surprising that many feminists initially rejected Freud and psychoanalytic theory because they saw psycholoanalysis as upholding and legitimating male dominance rather than analysing and explaining it. (Figs 1970, Chesler 1972) However, more recently some feminist theorists have taken a new look at psychoanalysis because it attempts to explain the non-rational aspects of human behaviour in a way which the other theories do not, and it is these theorists whose work is likely to be most relevant to an understanding of the behaviour and aims of non-sexist parents. Some, such as Juliet Mitchell (1974), have tried to show that Freud's position has been misrepresented, but others have developed his ideas in a different direction and adopted what Stockard and Johnson have termed a 'gynocentric' rather than a 'phallogocentric' perspective. Rather than concentrating on the child's relationship to its father, on the Oedipal complex and the superiority of the penis, they focus

instead on the initial primacy of the mother-infant relationship for both sexes and the effect that this has on the child's developing personality. Dorothy Dinnerstein, in 'The Rocking of the Cradle and the Ruling of the World' (1978) argues that when a baby is completely dependent on one woman (its mother) for fulfilling its emotional and physical needs, both sexes develop a deep-seated fear and envy of women and their power, and both men and women therefore agree, at an unconscious level, to let males have power in the adult world because this poses less of a psychological threat.

Nancy Chodorow, in 'The Reproduction of Mothering', also suggests that learning to feel female or male is a very early and basic experience resulting from the baby's attachment to its main caretaker. That person is almost always a woman, which for Chodorow has particular consequences for the kind of 'male' and 'female' personalities which emerge. She believes that children make an early emotional identification with an all-powerful mother or mother-figure, which they later need to break in order to achieve a separate sense of self. This results in a different kind of identity for boys and girls. Girls need to make a less sharp break, since they are female like their

mothers, and so can maintain a sense of continuity and connectedness. Chodorow argues that this fosters characteristics like relatedness and empathy in daughters, but also a difficulty in distancing themselves from events and in thinking abstractly. Boys have to gain their sense of self by rejecting their original feminine identification and building a sense of masculinity from what is not feminine, and they thus develop a more analytical and less personal way of looking at the world, and difficulty in relating closely to others. Male identity is defined by separation, and men fear that if others get too close they will lose their sense of themselves. In contrast, a feeling of connection is embedded in a woman's primary sense of self and she tends to fear that separation will lead to isolation, and that the ending of a relationship will mean the loss of her sense of herself, which makes her more dependent on others. These different personality characteristics, according to Chodorow, reproduce themselves in each generation:

"The sexual and familial division of labour in which women mother and are more involved in interpersonal affective relationships than men produces in daughter and sons a division of psychological capacities which leads them to reproduce this sexual and familial division of labour".(Chodorow, 1978, 7).

The boy's need to differentiate himself from his mother gives him a sense of 'otherness' and a tendency to

objectify women, which Chodorow in a later paper extends to our culture as a whole:

"The fetishism of commodities, the excessive rationalisation of technological thought, the rigid self - other distinctions of capitalism or of bureaucratic mass societies, all have genetic and psychological roots in the structure of parenting and of male development, not just in the requirements of production", (Chodorow, 1981, 503).

The position of gynocentric theorists like Chodorow differs from Freud in stressing the pregenital experiences of the child and the early mother-child relationship, and in rejecting the biological determinism implicit in Freudian theory. Chodorow follows the psychoanalytic tradition in emphasising the psychological nature of the processes underlying the acquisition of a gender identity and sex role.

"The contemporary reproduction of mothering occurs through social structurally induced psychological processes. It is neither a product of biology nor of intentional role training". (Chodorow, 1978, 7)

2.3 Social learning theory

The social learning model developed by theorists like Mischel (1966) and Mussen (1969), on the other hand, does not concern itself with such unobservable phenomena. Its major assumption is that the acquisition and performance of sex-typed behaviours

"can be described by the same learning principles used to analyse any other aspect of an individual's behaviour" (Mischel 1966, 56).

The social learning position derives from the behaviourist school of thought, which emphasises the importance of behavioural outcomes for the imprinting of behavioural patterns. The learning principles on which it rests include "discrimination, generalisation ... observational learning ... the pattern of reward, non-reward and punishment under specific contingencies, (and) the principles of direct and vicarious conditioning" (Mischel 1966, 57). The emphasis is on observable, antecedent events, rather than on inferred intrapsychic processes like Oedipal fantasy or individuation.

According to the social learning model, children learn the behaviour regarded as appropriate to their sex through differential reinforcement from parents, teachers, peers and others. They begin to anticipate the consequences of various behaviours, and begin to value gender 'appropriate' behaviours because they are rewarded, and to devalue gender 'inappropriate' behaviours because they are punished or ignored. The child learns the label ('boy' or 'girl') appropriate to the rewarded behaviours, and learns to apply that label to her or himself. Through generalisation the child learns to value the label 'girl' or 'boy' since it stands for valued behaviours, and to see the label as an important part of her or his self-concept. Gender identity, according

to social learning theory, is just another name for this self-label. In Kohlberg's terms the boy thinks 'I want rewards. I am rewarded for doing boy things, therefore I want to be a boy' (Kohlberg 1966, 89).

Social learning theory makes no assumptions about the age at which any of these processes take place, it only states that this is the sequence in which the development of sex role and gender identity occurs.

Although social learning theory invokes the mechanisms of imitation and modelling as well as of reward and punishment, it conceives of these in a behaviouristic way, and pays little attention to the cognitive or affective aspects of modelling. The child is conceived of as a 'tabula rasa', ready to be imprinted by the contingencies of reinforcement.

The evidence for the differential reinforcement on which the social learning model is based is contradictory. On the one hand, Maccoby and Jacklin (1975) have claimed on the basis of their analysis of published research that young children are for the most part not treated differently by their parents on the basis of their sex. Others such as Block (1978) have disagreed however and asserted that there is considerable differential treatment in early childhood. Certainly in the case of toy provision, there is fairly convincing evidence that

children are treated differently. Toys are traditionally divided into those appropriate for girls and those appropriate for boys, with a third category of 'neutral' toys (educational, colouring, etc.) permissible for either sex. In a survey of British boy catalogues, Sara Delamont found that the toys and games portrayed as suitable for girls offered them a restricted range of largely domestic roles - cleaning, cooking, sewing and shopping - whereas boys' toys encouraged scientific and technical skills and offered more adventurous, exciting roles. (Delamont 1980) In America, various studies have demonstrated that these stereotypes do affect people's behaviour. Participant observation in the toy department of a large American store over Christmas 1972 confirmed that although shoppers bought similar toys for children under two, after that toys were divided along sex-typed lines. People spent longer choosing toys for boys, spent more on them, and bought hardly any scientific toys for girls (Goodman and Lever 1974). Sales personnel have been shown to reinforce these traditional sex role expectations when asked to recommend a toy for a five-year-old nephew or niece (Ungar 1982).

Studies which demonstrate that children of employed mothers tend to have more liberal perceptions of sex are also used by social learning theorists. The literature

on maternal employment suggests that having a mother in paid employment usually does lead to less stereotyped sex role attitudes (most of the findings relate to daughters; there has been very little research on the effect of maternal employment on boys). Girls have been shown to be more likely to choose other occupations than 'housewife' when their own mothers work, and to plan to work themselves after having children; (Hartley 1960), they seem to be more assertive and independent (Vogel et al 1970) and to have more liberal views on the roles of men and women in society (Iglitzin 1972). In a comprehensive review of the data on maternal employment, Lois Hoffman concludes that "maternal employment is associated with less traditional sex role concepts, more approval of maternal employment, and a higher evaluation of female competence". (Hoffman, 1974)

There are several ways in which this effect could work; either through the increased status and power that mothers achieve by working outside the home in a society that values the role of wage earner far higher than that of housewife (although the kind of employment open to them and the expectation that they fit this in with the demands of housework and childcare, makes this increased power a debatable assumption); through the greater sharing of roles both inside and outside of the home

that children in two-parent families are likely to see if both their parents work, or through the beneficial effects on a young girl's developing personality, according to psychoanalysts like Nancy Chodorow, of having a mother who is not totally involved with home and children but is slightly more detached and has a life outside the home. Studies demonstrating the liberalising effect of maternal employment on children's sex roles can be used to support all three of the theoretical positions on gender identity development, but social learning theorists concentrate on the non-traditional modelling aspect of employed mothers.

Apart from direct reinforcement of different behaviours in boys and girls and modelling of the behaviour of parents and others, social learning theory relies also on the reinforcement of traditional sex role behaviour through symbolic models in books and on television. A large number of studies document the restricted view of appropriate sex role behaviour presented in children's books, especially for girls. In one well-known study of award winning picture books for young children (Weitzman et al 1972), females were under-represented in titles, central roles, pictures and stories. Most of the books were about boys, men and male animals, and most dealt exclusively with male adventures. When female characters

did appear they were usually insignificant and passive, and very few women were shown in adult roles other than wife and mother. Numerous other studies have documented the same kind of stereotypes, in picture books, story books, reading schemes and school textbooks (e.g. Lobban 1974, Women on Words and Images 1972). Various publishers and organisations have issued guidelines for the elimination of sexism in material they produce (e.g. McGraw-Hill Book Company 1974, Women in the Publishing Industry Group 1982) but these seem to be slow in having the desired effect. The Ladybird books, long notorious for their sexism, were almost as stereotyped in 1977 in a new revised version as had been found previously. (Whiting 1981)

Television too reinforces these traditional notions of masculinity and femininity that children are learning elsewhere. Women and girls appear as characters far less frequently, and in more restricted roles (Sternglanz and Serbin 1974). In advertisements, about three-quarters of all the women who appear are situated in the bathroom or the kitchen (Courtney and Whipple 1974). Mamay and Simpson's analysis of over three hundred American television commercials found that women were depicted in three main roles: maternal, housekeeping and aesthetic (Mamay and Simpson 1981).

In a week's worth of British TV programmes for young children analysed in 1975, there were few heroines, and boys were the more active characters who had all the adventures (Koerber 1977). Linda Busby in the USA concluded in her comprehensive review of research on the mass media that "Sex roles in the mass media are traditional and do not yet reflect the impact of the recent Women's Liberation Movement" (Busby 1975, 126), and Durkin and Akhtar more recently came to the same conclusion in Britain (Durkin and Akhtar 1983).

It thus appears clear that such stereotypes do exist in the media, but the evidence is less clearcut concerning the effects of this reinforcement on children's developing sex roles. The assumption underlying the social learning position is that the kind of toys children are given and the models they see on television and in books will directly mould their behaviour and attitudes. The toys which girls are traditionally given will teach them that their main role in life is as housewife and mother, and will also tend to position them indoors, supervised and protected. The toys boys are given are more likely to be played with outside and to encourage active play and the development of mechanical and spatial skills.

There is some evidence that visuo-spatial ability is related to play with traditionally masculine toys such

as blocks and construction toys (Connor and Serbin 1977) and that girls who play more with these toys have greater spatial skills than those who don't (Coates et al 1974). The evidence for the effect of stereotyped models in books and television on children's sex roles comes from studies which correlate the amount of viewing time with sex role attitudes or toy choice, and from studies which investigate the effect of presenting children with non-stereotyped models on television or in books. Various researchers have found that heavy TV viewers are more likely to hold sex-typed notions of appropriate careers and personality characteristics for women and men than moderate or light viewers. (Frueh and McGhee 1975, Beuf 1974, McGhee and Frueh 1980). Providing non-sexist characters in reading schemes (Jenkins 1977), TV programmes (Miller and Reeves 1975, Durkin and Akhtar 1983), TV adverts (Atkins and Miller 1975, Pingree 1978) or in children's stories (Flerx et al 1976, Ashby and Wittmaier 1978, Ashton 1983) has been shown to give children more flexible ideas about sex roles. However experimental research has yet to provide evidence of the long-term effects of exposure to such non-stereotypic models, and many of the studies cited above found that the relationship between media content and children's sex role stereotypes was more complex than a straightforward shaping of attitudes and behaviour would suggest. Children might be

influenced in their ideas about the kind of jobs women could hold by seeing a woman portrayed as a judge, but be unaffected by seeing her as a computer programmer or a technician (Atkins and Miller 1975); they may be receptive to non-stereotypic portrayals at one age but unaffected or even made more stereotyped in their views by such information at a later age. In Pingree's study, for instance, the eighth grade boys were more traditional in their ideas after seeing women as athletes and professionals than after seeing them as housewives and mothers. Similarly Guttentag and Bray's longer-term programme to counter sex role stereotypes in American school classrooms was effective for most children but seemed to make ninth grade boys even more sexist (Guttentag and Bray 1976), and in Britain Durkin and Akhtar's television programme showing a puppet family in non-traditional roles changed the responses of five-to-seven-year-old children in a more liberal direction, but their anti-sexist career film shown to adolescents had no effect in persuading them that their occupational horizons could extend beyond traditional sex role stereotypes. Other studies have demonstrated that children interpret what they see in accordance with their existing stereotypes; when asked to describe a videotape of a child's visit to Doctor Mary and Nurse David, most first

grade and many seventh grade children reinterpreted the facts to fit their preconceptions of doctors as men, women as nurses, and missed the heavily emphasised role reversal in the film. (Drabman et al 1976)

Thus although there is ample evidence that traditional sex role stereotypes are portrayed in the media and do exist to some extent in parents' expectations and behaviour towards their children, there is less support for the deterministic assumption of the social learning position that these stereotypes directly shape children's behaviour and beliefs, with little regard for the cognitive or affective aspects of learning. The third major model of gender identity acquisition, the cognitive developmental view, stresses in contrast the active role which children play in constructing their own gender identity and sex role.

2.4 Cognitive Developmental Theory

Cognitive developmental theorists also emphasise the role of culture and the media in sex role learning, and incorporate the evidence from many of the studies cited above, but they believe that rather than passively learning such stereotypes through reinforcement and modelling, children actively seek out and create them. They emphasise the interaction of the child with his or her culture. Durkin and Akhtar, for instance, argue on the

basis of their review of the effects of television on children's sex roles, that "children are clearly not simply accumulating messages, but are organising and interpreting the TV world" (Durkin and Akhtar 1983).

In the cognitive developmental framework, the relationship between sex role and gender identity described by the social learning theorists is reversed. The child's sense of being a girl or a boy develops first, from being labelled as such by others and from observation of the world around them, and this awareness leads the child to actively choose toys, activities and behaviour appropriate to his or her sex. Kohlberg, the main proponent of this position, summarises the child's thinking as "I am a boy, therefore I want to do boy things, therefore the opportunity to do boy things and to gain approval for doing them is rewarding" (Kohlberg 1966).

Cognitive developmental theory is based on the work of Piaget, and begins with the assumption that the child's reality is qualitatively different an adult's perception of reality. The way children see the world changes in discrete stages until it matches that of adults. Kohlberg argues that the very young child is unaware of being male or female, but around the age of $2\frac{1}{2}$ to 3 comes to

categorise herself as a girl or himself as a boy, and then to try to find out what girls or boys are supposed to do. At this age children can usually classify their own sex consistently and accurately (Thompson 1975), and attempts to reassign the child to the opposite sex after the age of two are generally unsuccessful (Money and Erhardt 1972, Money and Tucker 1975), but this early gender identity does not include the concept of gender constancy. Most children cannot reliably label the sex of others until four or five (Rabban 1950, Thompson and Bentler 1971) and are not convinced of the constancy of a person's sex until around the age of six (De Vries 1969, Kohlberg 1966). Before this, they think that they could change sex if they wanted to, or if they altered the length of their hair or wore different clothes, and do not understand that sex is dependent on genital differences and unchangeable. In Kohlberg's view, once children realise that people come in one of two sexes and that they themselves are a member of one or the other, they will actively seek opportunities to behave in ways they see as consistent with their sex.

The child uses sex to structure his or her social environment, and forms categories or 'schemata' to interpret what he or she sees and to predict future behaviour. New information is assimilated through these schemata

and the categories become increasingly refined as the child's cognitive maturity increases. From saying that all men are doctors and women are nurses (even if their own mother is a doctor), or that girls play with dolls and boys can't, children are seen as developing more subtle and complex distinctions like 'most doctors are men but some are nurses, and women can be doctors too'.

In Kohlberg's view, children are motivated by a desire for competence and a positive self-image, and rewards are effective less as automatic reinforcers (as the social learning theorists would have it), than as useful sources of information about what is acceptable and approved behaviour. The function of reinforcement in cognitive developmental theory is to serve as a 'judgement of normative conformity' and 'as instruction and definition of the right answer' (Kohlberg 1966, 440), rather than as a direct shaper of behaviour. Although modelling and reinforcement do have a role to play in Kohlberg's theory, the emphasis has shifted from the reinforcer on the model to the child as the key person in the process.

Cognitive developmental theory is a stage theory in the sense that an individual must develop one mode of understanding before proceeding to another. Several

other investigators have also used the stage theory approach, and extended it to look at changing conceptions of sex roles over the whole of childhood - and in some cases adulthood too (e.g. Katz's work on 'A lifespan perspective', 1979). Ullian has investigated how children's ideas about sex roles change depending on their age and cognitive stage. Working from interviews with children aged six to eighteen, she has constructed a model involving six levels of sex role conceptualisation, in which children move from a biological through a societal to a psychological orientation by adolescence (Ullian 1976). While Kohlberg ten years earlier did not concern himself with the desirability or otherwise of traditional sex role stereotypes for adults, in her work Ullian rejects the traditional notion that conformity to sex role standards is the end point of development, and conceives instead of a stage beyond this 'appropriate' sex-typing. Rebecca et al (1976) likewise propose a 'model of sex-role transcendence' where children move from an undifferentiated to a polarised, either-or view of sex roles, and then to a third stage which transcends these roles, so that individuals respond to the demands of the situation (and to the demands of their personal strengths and weaknesses) rather than limit themselves by definitions of what they may or may not do because of their sex.

Cognitive developmental theorists accept that children will pass through a sex-typed stage, but some feel that development should not stop there:

"It seems to us that it is functional and desirable that, in learning sex roles, children use the organising technique of polarities and see discrete entities in order to make sense of an inherently indivisible world. The difficulty, however, is that our society reinforces and idealises this form of perception not as a temporary organising device, but as the ultimate adult goal with regards to sex-role learning and behaviour" (Rebecca et al, 1976, 203).

2.5 Differences in Sex Role Learning for boys and girls

The cognitive developmental position has been described as a 'unisex theory' in that it postulates the same process of gender identity acquisition for girls and boys. Both are motivated by the same desire for competence and a positive self-image (Weitz 1977, 82).

The other two major theories however both note differences in the sex role socialisation process for girls and boys.

They generally assert that the acquisition of a stable gender identity is more problematic for a boy than for a girl. Social learning theorists argue that the pressures to conform to a traditional sex role are far heavier on boys, both from adults and from peers. There is no lack of empirical evidence to support this claim. Saul Feinman asked over a hundred college students to rate one-sentence descriptions of a young child engaging

in various behaviours 'inappropriate' for their sex, and showed that both men and women indicated greater disapproval of cross-sex behaviour in boys than in girls (Feinman, 1974). Rabban questioned mothers of children aged between $2\frac{1}{2}$ and 8 about their attitudes to their child's association with and interest in the games of opposite-sex playmates. He found that they were more permissive about their daughter's than their son's cross-sex activities and interests (Rabban, 1950). Other studies have documented the same effect, that parents are tolerant of girls playing with boys' toys but not vice versa (Lansky, 1967, Fling and Manosevitch, 1972). Parents have also been shown to hold traditional expectations for the kind of jobs their sons should take although their ideas are becoming less stereotyped for their daughters (Thornburg and Weeks, 1975).

It is far more acceptable for a girl to be a 'tomboy' than it is for a boy to be a 'sissy'. Indeed, tomboyism is seen as quite a natural part of growing up, what Pogrebin describes as a 'cute transitional stage', unlike the non-traditional boy's 'scandalous failure to join the privileged caste' (Pogrebin, 1980). As far back as 1959, one researcher wrote that "a tomboy is as well-liked as a 'young lady' - and sometimes better", (Gray, 1959), and more recently Hyde and Rosenberg

found that well over half of the women and schoolgirls they interviewed in America considered themselves to be or to have been tomboys. They concluded that 'tomboyism is not so much abnormal as it is typical for girls' (Hyde and Rosenberg, 1974, 113). Being a 'sissy', on the other hand, is far less acceptable. Richard Green in his textbook for health practitioners asserts that 'the garden variety tomboy will outgrow it' whereas the 'sissy' condition in males should be referred to physicians for 'management' (Green, 1975). 'Unmanly' behaviour in boys has long received censure. Mrs Graham in Ann Bronte's 'Tenant of Wildfell Hall' is criticised for making her son Arthur into "a veriest milksop". "You'll treat him like a girl, you'll spoil his spirit and make a mere Miss Nancy of him" (Bronte 1968). The fathers in Evelyn Pitcher's study in the early 1960s were far more concerned to discourage 'feminine' behaviour in their young sons, than tomboyish behaviour in their daughters, and one remarked vehemently 'I can't bear female characteristics in a man, I abhor them' (Pitcher, 1974). Although the more recent trend is against such overt discouragement of 'feminine' behaviour in boys, it nevertheless seems that parents are still more permissive of non-traditional sex-role behaviour in their daughters than in their sons. Non-traditional behaviour in boys still seems to make parents more

uncomfortable, and to stir up fears about homosexuality in a way that it does not for girls. Children not unnaturally pick up these pressures and are themselves a strong influence on the sex-role attitudes of their peers, and again it has been demonstrated that the strongest peer disapproval is brought to bear on boys rather than girls who fail to conform to their sex role. Beverley Fagot found that in nursery schools, boys who played with dolls, dress-up and kitchen toys were criticised by their classmates six times as often as other children, while girls who tried out 'masculine' activities like blocks, hammers, transportation toys or sandpit play might be ignored by their peers but were not criticised in the same way (Fagot, 1977). The representatives of the UCLA Gender Identity Project, in a debate reported under the title 'Does a boy have the right to be effeminate?', argued that their attempts to eliminate by behaviourist principles 'effeminate' gestures in young boys were justified because they suffered social problems, including ridicule from peers, in a way that 'tomboy' girls did not (Horn, 1979).

It is notable that all of these studies refer to young children. Tomboyism may indeed be tolerated as a 'cute transitional stage', but a stage it must be, and once children reach puberty the position reverses and the

pressures on girls intensify not to stray outside the very limited female role.

During the initial process of gender identity development, however, it seems clear that boys are subjected to greater pressure to conform to traditional sex role expectations than are girls. In addition, social learning theorists such as David Lynn have pointed out that since fathers are generally less available as models for young children than are mothers, boys have to abstract a notion of the masculine role from peers and unrealistic media models, whereas girls have far more opportunities for imitating 'feminine' behaviours both from watching their mothers and later from the predominantly female early school environment (Lynn, 1979).

Psychoanalytic theorists have attempted to explain why there should be this greater concern with the development of a masculine gender identity in boys, whereas most social learning theorists (unlike Lynn) have been content to document its existence. Feminist psychoanalysts point to the fact that boys need to break their initial identification with a woman (since their initial primary parent is almost always their mother, or a female mother-substitute) and to achieve their sense of maleness through rejecting what is female. They argue that this leads to a more tenuous sense of identity in boys (and men) and

and hence to a greater need to conform to traditional sex role stereotypes and to a denial of the female part of their own identity generated by their early identification with their mother. Other feminist writers have emphasised the devaluing of the feminine role and the greater prestige and value attached to the masculine role in explaining boys' greater reluctance to tolerate or welcome behaviours they see as 'girlish'.

Whatever the explanation, there is clear evidence that young boys do cling more closely to stereotyped behaviour than do girls, even if they don't express the 'virtual panic at being caught doing anything traditionally defined as feminine' that Ruth Hartley described in 1967. They show a stronger preference for boys' toys than girls do for girls' toys (Ward, 1968), and are more reluctant than girls to change their initial 'appropriate' toy choice for a sex-inappropriate one at the researcher's suggestion (Ross and Ross, 1972).

In a study of over two hundred 4-10-year-old Swedish children by Maureen McConaghy, the boys were also markedly more reluctant to be photographed holding anything they saw as an 'opposite-sex' toy. Over a third of the boys refused to do so compared to only one girl, and fewer of the girls saw any toy as

inappropriate for them to play with in the first place (McConaghy, 1978). Young boys have been shown to choose a boring sex-neutral toy in preference to a highly attractive 'feminine' one (Maccoby and Jacklin, 1975), to be more reluctant to play the role of a girl in a 'pretend' telephone conversation than are girls to play at being a boy (Sears et al 1965), and to be more restrictive when asked to assign occupations to women and men according to their sex (Iglitzin, 1972). Persuading boys to behave in ways not seen as 'appropriate' for their sex appears more difficult than persuading girls to do likewise.

2.6 Summary

The three major theories of gender identity development reviewed in this chapter vary in their assumptions about whether gender identity precedes or develops from sex role, about the age at which these components develop, the differences in the process for boys and girls, and about the ways in which parents, through identification and/or reinforcement, affect the development of gender identity and sex role. The theories have in common the fact that they were developed to explain the emergence of traditional sex roles, and apart from the work of recent feminist psychoanalysts and of cognitive developmental theorists like Ullian and Rebecca et al, there

has been little attempt to consider the implications of these theories for the development of non-traditional sex role behaviour and attitudes. 'Theoretical frameworks' would perhaps be a more accurate description of these accounts of the process of gender identity acquisition than 'theories', since they reflect their proponents' areas of interest and methodological preferences as much as offering rival explanations for the same facts. The social learning theorists' concentration on observable behaviour, the cognitive developmental theorists' focus on the child's active role in making sense of their environment, and the psychoanalysts' speculation about underlying psychological mechanisms and interpersonal dynamics, all reflect what each group of theorists finds interesting rather than providing mutually exclusive accounts. The research presented in this thesis was not undertaken to test the validity of the various theoretical positions, nor to evaluate their ability to suggest how children could learn non-stereotyped sex roles, but the different perspectives did provide a useful framework for analysing the way in which the parents in this study conceived of non-sexist child-rearing and for discussing the results and concepts that emerged from the data. In the next chapter, the methodological assumptions underlying the collection and analysis of the data are described in more detail.

CHAPTER THREE

THE RESEARCH DESIGN

3.0 Aims of the Study

I began this study because despite the considerable literature on the restrictive effects of traditional sex roles, on sex role stereotyping in schools and jobs and on attempts to counteract this in schools, in the media and via legislation, very little is known about what might be involved in trying to undo these stereotypes within the home. For this reason my concern was not with testing hypotheses but, to use Ann Oakley's apt description in her introduction to 'The Sociology of Housework', my goals were "mapping out an area, describing a field, and connecting events, processes or characteristics which appear to go together". (Oakley, 1974, p.33) The focus of the research is the parents' perceptions of non-sexist childrearing, and the way in which they make sense of their attempts to raise their children in a less sex-stereotyped way. It adopts the perspective of the interactionist school of thought, which stresses the importance of trying to understand a phenomenon from the point of view of those involved in it. It shows how this group of parents constructed, negotiated and defined a conception of non-sexist childrearing.

3.1 Selection of Participants

For the kind of research described above, it was more appropriate (and more likely to yield valid information) to investigate in depth a fairly small number of cases, than to undertake any large-scale quantitative survey. The parents who participated in the study were recruited mainly through the avenues of the Women's Liberation Movement, since this is where concepts like sex role stereotyping have been the most widely discussed, and therefore where I expected to find the clearest examples of the phenomenon in which I was interested. Several participants were from a women's study group who had agreed to discuss the topic of non sexist childrearing and allow me to tape this as part of the initial process of familiarising myself with the area to be studied. Some were contacted through a note in a feminist newsletter and in a bookshop, others were recommended by parents I had already interviewed or by friends. Several names were passed on by a colleague whose work on children's development of gender identity was reported briefly in a national newspaper, but who did not have the time to contact the people who wrote to him saying they fitted his description of 'parents who have deliberately tried to show their children alternatives to traditional sex roles'.

All of the parents in the study conformed to the criteria of having at least one child born after the current feminist wave (i.e. ten years or under when I began the fieldwork), of not being well known to me personally before the research began, and of defining themselves as consciously trying to raise their children in a less sex-stereotyped way. I adopted these minimal criteria since I was primarily concerned to discover how parents themselves thought of non-sexist childrearing, rather than to impose my own criteria and to fit people into my definition of what it should mean. Beyond this, my selection of parents to participate in the study was guided by the theoretical sampling approach developed by Glaser and Strauss (1968), in which new cases are sought to develop, test, modify and extend the hypotheses which begin to emerge from the research. It became increasingly clear, for instance, that the sex of the child was an important factor determining how far parents felt able and willing to modify traditional sex roles, and this was reflected in the greater difficulty I experienced in finding parents concerned about the effects of sex role stereotyping on their sons. At one stage daughters outnumbered sons by seventeen to seven, and in the later stages of the research, I made a particular effort to locate families with boy children. Another hypothesis which emerged during the process of data collection was

that structural factors in the organisation of society greatly affected the parents' ability to encourage and to practice non-traditional sex role behaviour, which led me to look for parents living in a variety of different ways and with different levels of income.

The study finally involved thirty adults in eighteen families, all white and mostly in their late twenties and thirties (age range 25-40). Between them these parents had thirty children, eighteen girls (9 school age, 9 pre-school) and twelve boys (8 school age, 4 pre-school), with ages ranging from six months to twelve years. In addition there were three older teenage children by one mother's previous marriage. Although they are not included in the study as they were largely brought up before the recent resurgence of the Women's Movement and a consciousness of sex role stereotyping, they are referred to briefly in chapter 8.5 when discussing the nature of the parent-child relationship. The parents' material circumstances varied from a single parent struggling on social security or two adults finding it difficult to take equal responsibility for childcare because they couldn't afford to lose a day of the father's pay, to families where both parents had lecturing or teaching jobs and could afford to pay for live-in childcare help. Their living situations covered parents living together but unmarried, single parents, a couple who divorced mainly for political reasons but still lived

together, a mother and her lover, two couples sharing a household, a single woman bringing her child up in a community of people who lived and worked together, and monogamous married couples. Details of the families are presented in table 4.1, page

3.2 Methods of Data Collection

In-depth interviewing offered the most obvious source of data for an investigation of the meaning and significance parents attach to the concept of non-sexist childrearing. Semi-structured interviews with parents provided the bulk of the material for this study, but other sources of information were also used since such "methodological triangulation" offers a means of increasing the validity of the data obtained, as Denzin has pointed out.

"Rather than limiting studies to one method (which increases the risk of that method being inappropriate), sociologists can judiciously utilize multiple methods, thereby escaping the inherent limitations of a single field strategy".
(Denzin 1970, 320)

The other sources of data for this study were what Webb (1966) has termed 'unobtrusive observational measures', and detailed case-studies of four families which included repeat visits over a three-year period, informal observation, and a variety of techniques designed to elicit the attitudes and ideas of the children in those families. These three sources of data are discussed below.

(a) Interviews

Interviewing constitutes an important tool in the data collection procedures of researchers operating within very different methodological traditions, and adopting different types of interviewing strategies. The main distinctions are between standardised versus non-standardised, and schedule versus non-schedule.

Standardised interviews attempt to obtain the same information from each respondent while non-standardised interviews make no attempt to do so. Schedule interviews make use of a list of questions, usually with the wording and sequence determined in advance, whereas in non-schedule interviews there is variation in the wording and order of questions.

Denzin suggests that it is often possible and fruitful to combine these different strategies so that, for example, standard information is obtained from all participants while non-scheduled and non-standardised items are also included (Denzin 1970, 127). This was the approach I adopted; using a combination of standardised and non-standardised, schedule and non-schedule. For no interviews did I use a completely fixed, standardised schedule since while such an approach might be suitable for the collection of large-scale survey data it would obviously be inappropriate for a study of the meaning of non-sexist childrearing.

John Lofland's description of in-depth interviewing fitted my requirements in the research far more closely:

"The emphasis is on obtaining narratives or accounts in the person's own terms. One wants the character and contours of such accounts to be set by the interviewee. The researcher might have a general idea of the kinds of things that will compose the account but still be interested in what the interviewee provides on his own and the terms in which he or she does it". (Lofland 1971, 81)

My 'general idea of the kinds of things that will compose the account' was largely drawn from the transcript of a group discussion on the topic of non-traditional sex role socialisation which I set up and taped in the initial stages of the research, as well as from my personal history and a preliminary reading of the literature (see section 3.4a). This provided the basis for designing an interview schedule which was piloted on several parents I knew who were trying to avoid sex role stereotyping, and modified in the light of their comments. (Appendix 2) The topics covered included the parents' aims and ideals, their methods, other influences on their children's ideas, an open-ended description of the children's characters, any difficulties they had met and how they had tried to overcome them, how they divided up household and childcare tasks, their current interests and involvement in activities outside the home, and finally their recollections of their own upbringing and how they felt that had affected their ideas as parents themselves. In order to increase the validity of the data I sought information on a particular topic in several different forms within the interview. The parents' division of

labour, for example, was addressed in various ways, by (1) asking them to describe in detail what they had done the previous day from getting up, (2) presenting them with a list of household and childcare tasks and asking them who usually did each, and (3) asking them how important they felt it to be that they provide their children with a non-sexist example in terms of their own behaviour.

This schedule provided a framework for the interviews and ensured that certain standard information was obtained from all the families (for instance, details of their own background and their policy on the provision of toys, books, etc.), while the flexibility in the wording and ordering of questions and the inclusion of as many open-ended questions as possible meant that parents were able to focus on the issues most important to them, to raise new issues, or to summarise entire sections of the schedule in one long sequence of statements.

The majority of the interviews were conducted in 1979/80, a few in 1982 to increase the number of parents involved in the research who had sons. They lasted between one and four hours and most were in the parent's own home. Both parents were interviewed (except in the case of the four single mothers). As researchers such as McKee and O'Brien have pointed out (1982) fathers have long been

left out of childrearing studies, with their opinions and behaviour assessed - if at all - from reports by the mother. Quite apart from the well-documented fact that fathers play an important role in their child's learning of sex roles (e.g. Block 1973, Johnson 1975), it would have made a mockery of the subject of the study to have focused only on mothers and their ideas about childcare. I left the decision about whether parents were interviewed separately or together up to the individuals concerned. Researchers have disagreed on the relative merits of joint versus separate interviewing of couples (e.g. Allan 1980), and I felt that participants were more likely to provide detailed, honest information in situations where they felt least threatened and inconvenienced. In practice nine of the fourteen couples (excluding the four single mothers) were interviewed separately, and five couples were seen together. The main advantage of the latter was in giving an indication of the kind of relationship that existed between the parents (was one partner noticeably more dominant? Did they tend to agree or disagree on important issues?) and also in seeing which person answered which questions. Did the mother answer all the specific questions about arrangements and details of childcare, for instance, while the father answered those about the objectives of schooling and political involvement? (Usually they did not.) The main advantage

of interviewing separately was that parents often seemed more frank, and generally went into more depth and detail when able to continue a line of thought without interruption (although the joint interviews could achieve a comparable depth, especially when parents seemed to forget the tape recorder and interviewer and began discussing ideas raised by the questions between themselves).

In my approach to the interviews I rejected many of the traditional assumptions of what constitutes 'good' interviewing. The assumption that it is a one-way process in which the interviewer asks questions but does not respond with any information in order to avoid bias, that she avoids getting too close to her 'subjects' but is just friendly enough to establish the necessary rapport, and that it is important to maintain an air of expertise which establishes the interviewer as the one in control of the situation, were all values which were inappropriate to the kind of research I wished to undertake. I saw the interviews "less as a data-collecting instrument for researchers, than as a data-collecting instrument for those whose lives are being researched", as Ann Oakley puts it in her chapter on 'Interviewing Women' (Oakley 1981, 49). This decision was initially an ethical one, but it also had methodological advantages in terms of the quality of the data that I obtained. I was careful

not to express my own opinions too early or in a way that I felt would influence the kind of information parents felt able to provide, but I found that once their own views had emerged and a degree of trust been established, it encouraged them to talk more freely if I occasionally described my own experiences, or summarised some of the points other parents I had interviewed had made and asked their opinion, or answered questions like 'what does the research say about mixed versus single sex schools?'. I wanted parents to feel able to think their ideas through and contradict themselves if necessary, to express doubts and reservations and to talk about compromises they made and instances where they knew their behaviour or feelings failed to match up to their principles. Overall I was impressed by the extent to which they were prepared to discuss such contradictions rather than to attempt to present themselves as perfect non-sexist parents.

"I'd like to think I'd be happy staying at home if Anna got a job and supported us, but I think the reality might be different" (Jeff Brierley, working full time while his wife stays at home).

"I think I'd find it very difficult if she came home and said 'Look I'm interested in girls, I'm a lesbian and that's the way I want to make my life'". (Jill Harrison, son 4 and daughter 1½)

"It's easy to say glibly 'of course I'd like to bring out the feminine characteristics in a son, but I think I'd find that more difficult". (Tony O'Brien, daughter just 2)

The process of answering questions caused several parents to re-evaluate their behaviour, like the father who having said his son wasn't bought dolls or other "girls' toys" because he didn't seem to want them, added "in talking about it, I wonder now whether we shouldn't have made that sort of thing more available . . . waiting for him to actually ask for something like that is maybe pushing too much onto him . . . yes, maybe we should have made more available". Or the woman who felt that talking at length about her childhood had helped her to see it in a new light. "I've never really looked back on it all in one piece like this before".

(b) Unobtrusive Observational Measurements

I chose to make unobtrusive observations during the period I spent in each family's house interviewing the parents, rather than to engage in any more detailed participant observation. The reasons for this were twofold; firstly I was primarily interested in the parent's perceptions of non-sexist childrearing and the issues they saw as important, rather than in assessing the extent to which they put their principles into practice or the efficacy of their ideas in terms of the way their children behaved.

Secondly, to have obtained valid observational data in this area would have required detailed observation of family behaviour over a long period, with the attendant

difficulties of gaining access to a household for such an extended period of time, and of altering the parents' behaviour by the presence of an observer, particularly in a small, intimate setting like the family. Such a detailed study would in practice have had to be restricted to one or two families. All research involves compromise, and mine was to observe less, but with more families.

Rather than making extensive observations of one or two parents and their children, I chose instead to use various less obtrusive methods of validating the data obtained from all of the interviews. Immediately after each visit I made notes about the kind of house the family lived in; the contents of the child's room in terms of toys, books and general decor, and the clothing the children wore. I also recorded my impressions of the children and their parents and noted down any relevant incidents that occurred while I was in the house or any remarks made outside of the interview session. These notes were kept in a research diary and formed a useful supplement to the taped interview data.

Although the focus of the research was the parents and their ideas, I also met the children and generally saw them together with their parents or parent. In some cases this was a rather brief introduction, but with many others I spent some time with the children, and on several

occasions stayed for a meal or helped to put a child to bed. The observation was incidental rather than systematic, but served to give an impression of the kind of relationship that existed between parent and child, and often provided a check on what the parents had said in the interviews. Sometimes this took the form of backing up their statements (for instance when the three-year-old described by her mother as very sociable and confident, asked me to read her a bedtime story although I was a complete stranger, and then wanted me to change the boy hero in her book to a girl because she preferred it that way). Other times it showed up a mismatch between what the parents had said and the way they or their children behaved, as with the goodnight ritual from parents who had described themselves as equally able to be physically affectionate but whose children got a kiss only from mother, or the protectiveness of a parent who in the interview had expressed a strong commitment to allowing her child to be independent.

(c) Case Studies

The third strategy I adopted to generate data was the case-study approach, which provided a more detailed picture of what non-traditional sex role socialisation could look like in practice, and explored in greater depth some of the issues which had begun to arise in the process

of analysing the early data. Four families were selected as case-studies on the basis of their relevance as crucial testing grounds for these emerging hypotheses; and the initial 1979 interviews were followed up by several more visits to each family, which involved staying for mealtimes, bathtimes or overnight. A further interview took place approximately three years after the first to assess any changes in the parent's living situation or economic circumstances, any effect of the child growing older and starting or changing schools in the interim period, and any changes in the parents' views about non-sexist child-rearing. This interview data was supplemented by observational notes, and by talking to the children themselves. With the younger children I used a homemade family of cardboard dolls with stick-on clothes and various accessories such as cooker, sink, bath, beds, and a car, with which we played a 'pretend day' (see appendix 3). Although their play may not have directly reflected who did what in their house, it did provide a useful framework for encouraging them to talk and for eliciting some of their fantasies as they invented bedtime stories or playground games for the cardboard 'children'. With the five and six-year-olds I also asked more specific questions about their preferences in toys, books, clothes and friends; their experiences at school; their perceptions of what their parents did at home and at work; what they

wanted to do when they grew up and how they felt about adults and children who engaged in non-traditional sex role behaviour. The two older children were interviewed about the same kind of areas, but in greater depth.

(d) Status of the Data

All of the parents in this study were white, and the majority were middle-class. Membership of different ethnic or socio-economic groups could well affect how parents thought about non-sexist childrearing. One family in the study did contain a non-white child, a seven-year-old half West Indian boy adopted as a baby, and it was clear that encouraging non-stereotyped characteristics such as gentleness in a boy could have a different meaning in the context of bringing up a black child within a predominantly white culture. His mother described her ambivalent feelings about wanting him to grow up to be gentle, peaceful and non-aggressive, and yet realising that this may not serve him well as a member of an oppressed group.

"He may feel later on in adolescence that he wants to identify himself as a West Indian, and the West Indian view of themselves is changing very rapidly. The new generation is very much more aggressive, much tougher and on the defensive, and I think this has got to happen, that they have got to be aggressive towards the white community in order to get any modicum of, whatever you want to call it, economic or political rights. So that would be alright . . . but I'd hope it would be a toughness when it was needed and not a toughness all the time".
(Susan Durrant)

During the fieldwork I considered trying to involve parents from other socio-economic and ethnic groups, but finally decided against this because of the difficulties involved in locating such parents, and also because of the interpretative nature of the study. I wanted to explore in depth the meaning of non-sexist childrearing, and it seemed likely that more detailed and complex information could be obtained by talking to parents whose background characteristics and frame of reference I shared, and whose meanings I could therefore probe in greater depth. Harris and Friedman adopted a similar perspective in their research, into the meanings attached to the concept of the family by women who identified with the Women's Movement, and they felt that misinterpretation of questions and responses was reduced and the complexity of their interviews was increased

"by the possibility of interchange between interviewer and respondent, since it was clear to both that the interviewer was a member of the same social world as the respondent, operating the same labels and logic, and therefore capable of empathy". (Harris and Friedman 1979, 143)

This is not to argue that interviewers must necessarily share the characteristics of those they interview (there were many ways in which my background did differ from that of the participants, including my sex in the case of interviewing fathers); it is simply to state that the kind of in-depth research I wished to undertake was

facilitated by a degree of similarity in the backgrounds of myself and of the parents in the study.

Nor do I assume that the parents I studied represent the whole range of variation in the ways that parents might conceive of non-sexist childrearing. It would be unsafe to generalise from the views of the parents in this study to those of parents from other ethnic groups or social classes, or for that matter to homosexual parents or to men bringing up children alone, although the study may generate hypotheses about such groups, and thus provide fruitful directions for further research. Following Bracht and Glass's distinction between population and ecological validity (1968) I was aiming in this research for the latter. Population validity, which is based on statistical techniques and enables generalisations to be made from the research sample to other populations, was not appropriate for a study of this nature. The emphasis in ecological validity is on conducting research in natural settings, on obtaining the interpretations of the participants in the study and on not manipulating and interfering with the setting, and if these criteria are followed the data should accurately reflect the lives and perceptions of those being studied, and can therefore claim to provide a valid account of what non-sexist childrearing meant for the group of parents involved in this research.

3.3 Analysis of the Data

Accounts of social science research undertaken using quantitative methods usually offer a brief description of the tests used to collect data, and they concentrate in much more detail on the way in which the data is analysed and rendered quantitatively significant.

Qualitative methodologies on the other hand tend to emphasise the collection of the material and rarely describe in detail the means by which this mass of rich data is ordered and analysed. The paucity of detailed descriptive accounts of the process of analysis has prompted several authors to plead for more systematic accounts of how analysis is done (e.g. Becker 1958, Glaser 1978). There were three main phases in the analysis of the data presented in this thesis.

(a) Early Stages

Becker (1958) describes the first stage of data analysis as involving the selection and definition of problems, concepts and indices. Although Becker locates this process within the timescale of an actual research project, in fact the selection of a particular area for research depends very much on the researcher's own background and personal experiences and on factors in the social and political environment which determine the kinds of questions likely to seem important, and also the availability

of funding and access to resources. Both the kind of questions asked and the way in which the resulting data are perceived are strongly influenced by the personal and political context in which the research is carried out. A complete description of methodology needs to include this information and state the values and assumptions with which the project was undertaken, but this background is rarely provided, as various researchers have begun to point out, particularly those adopting a feminist or a 'new paradigm' approach (e.g. Roberts 1981, Reason and Rowan 1981).

"A step which is frequently omitted from descriptions of the research process is that of providing a background to the framework within which a piece of research is conceived and developed". (Roberts 1981, 17).

In my own case, various factors shaped my interest in and my initial approach to the study; growing up with a twin brother, which magnified the differences in the way we were treated and in the opportunities open to us; becoming involved in the Women's Movement in the mid nineteen seventies and becoming increasingly aware of the inequalities involved in sex role stereotyping; taking a postgraduate teacher training course, which led me to focus on the role of schools in maintaining traditional sex roles and to investigate the ways that teachers had tried to challenge this. It appeared from

the literature that there were few teachers trying to encourage non-traditional sex role behaviour, and that those who were, found it difficult to counteract the traditional stereotypes which children brought with them to school, ideas which they had learnt from parents, the media, friends and relatives. My interest shifted to the role the family could play in modifying children's sex roles, especially after I joined a housing co-operative and became involved in the care of two girls aged one and four living next door.

It was becoming clear too, some years after the passing of the Sex Discrimination Act and the setting up of the Equal Opportunities Commission, that legislation alone was inadequate to ensure sexual equality and that more fundamental changes were needed, both in socio-economic structures and in the attitudes people held about appropriate sex role behaviour. One way of affecting the latter that had been stressed by the Women's Movement was via the socialisation process. Although by the late seventies many feminists were developing more complex structural and psychological explanations for the continuation of traditional sex role stereotypes, this early emphasis on the importance of conditioning and the 'shaping' of children into traditional roles influenced the perspective with which I approached the research. It appeared that

although early feminists had written a good deal about 'the family' and its role in perpetuating traditional stereotypes, very little was known about attempts to challenge them. No-one appeared to have investigated ideas about the way in which children could be brought up in a less stereotyped way within the family.

It was at this stage that I began the research. I had certain ideas about the areas I thought a study of non-sexist childrearing should cover, mainly drawn from the social learning position on sex role development which characterised the early Women's Liberation Movement. Personal history, discussions with colleagues and friends, a preliminary reading of the literature and the issues raised by the women in the feminist study group described earlier, all combined to provide the basic framework within which the research was undertaken. Glaser suggests that an acceptable model for qualitative research is

"to enter the field with some combination of a clear question or problem area in mind, a general perspective, and a supply of beginning concepts and field research strategies". (Glaser 1978, 45)

My question was "how do parents committed to minimising sex role stereotyping in the upbringing of their children conceptualise their task, and what are the problems and difficulties which they describe encountering?" My general perspective was a feminist one; I took the view

that traditional sex role stereotypes are oppressive and unjust, particularly in their effects on women. My 'supply of beginning concepts' included notions such as 'masculinity' and 'femininity', 'the sexual division of labour' and 'socialising agents outside of the family'; and my initial research strategy involved conducting semi-structured interviews with parents committed to raising their children in a less sex-stereotyped way.

(b) During Fieldwork

During the process of data collection I transcribed the interviews soon after they were completed and also made notes on each, summarising the main points and supplementing these with notes from the research diary I kept during the fieldwork. I adopted the 'grounded theory' approach to analysis suggested by Glaser and Strauss (1967, also Glaser 1978), whereby notes, statements and events are coded in as many categories as possible and each compared with all of the other items in that category. New categories are added on and existing ones refined where necessary, often in order to incorporate or explain a 'deviant case' that appears not to fit with the rest of the data (see for example the case of Lynn and Mick Eldridge, chap.11.4). Some of the original topics assumed a greater importance as the interviews progressed, for instance the strength of economic and structural constraints on shared parenting or the importance of the sex of the

child in determining the parents' non-sexist philosophy; others seemed less relevant, such as the role played by grandparents in maintaining traditional sex roles. New concepts and themes arose during the fieldwork, both from the data and from the kind of 'experiential incidents' which Glaser suggests can provide a useful function "in developing sensitivity to what to sample for". (Glaser 1978, 51) Examples included the remarks made by two women friends giving birth to sons, who independently commented that they would now need to "find out more about this non-sexist childrearing business", whereas if the child had been a girl they both felt they would have had much more idea what to do. Their remarks sensitised me to the importance of the differences in non-traditional sex-role socialisation for boys and girls, and the greater confusion over what such an upbringing could or should involve for sons. Another example was my conversations with a psycho-analytically-oriented colleague, which drew my attention to some of the less easily observable factors hindering attempts at sex role change.

The analysis which proceeded alongside data collection shaped the direction the latter took. The emerging issues determined which families were selected as case-studies, and led me for instance to recruit more families with sons into the research.

(c) Final Analysis

Once all the fieldwork was completed and transcribed, I worked through all the notes, interview data and the list of topics and sub-topics drawn up during the course of data collection and preliminary analysis. For each theme, I wrote out in a separate notebook all the material relevant to that topic, which enabled me to see more clearly the patterns and contrasts within the data. This corresponded with the stage that Glaser has described as going beyond comparisons between single items in a category, to deriving properties of the categories and then comparing items with these properties and properties of one category with properties of another. For instance, comparing the individual examples coded under the category 'permissive ethos' resulted in a theme emerging which I labelled 'conflict between non-sexist and liberal beliefs', and this property when compared with other categories such as 'importance of discussion', 'authoritarian versus open relationships' and 'child wanting to behave in a sex-typed way', produced the higher-order concept of 'rejection of mechanical view of sex role learning'. Similarly the theme of 'strong mothers' which emerged from a consideration of the category 'parents' background' combined with other themes, such as the way in which men often cited the women they were involved with as the most important source of their feminist ideas and the greater emphasis placed on

non-sexist childcaring for daughters, to produce the concept of 'sex role change through women'. This in turn could be linked with themes arising from the category of 'limits and difficulties' to emphasise the relevance to any conception of non-sexist childrearing of women's subordinate position within society.

During this stage in the analysis I also tried to represent the data in tabular form, in order to provide a visual check on the themes which I had identified. Armed with several very large sheets of paper I attempted to draw up charts illustrating, for example, each parent's policy on toys, books and clothes (with columns headed 'censor', 'provide opposite-sex', 'allow opposite-sex', 'discuss' etc.), or depicting their division of labour (with separate charts for housework and childcare, and columns beside each task indicating whether the task was done mainly by the father, the mother, equally shared or by neither). The main lesson from this exercise was that the data could not be reduced to any neat, tabular form. The charts took no account of the changing circumstances of individual families, or the complicated process of bargaining and negotiation which generally underlay their division of labour, or the meaning the parents themselves attached to their behaviour. However in their very inadequacy these charts served a useful purpose, by underlining the importance of such

distinctions as the difference between doing a task and having the primary responsibility for making sure it gets done. Attempting to tabulate the parents' replies to the question 'who does what?' in terms of childcare and housework resulted in most cases in an apparently equal division of labour, which conflicted with the strong impression gained from re-reading all the transcripts that this was not the case. The constant comparative method produced one explanation for this disparity; women retained the essential responsibility for even those tasks which were shared, especially childcare.

At the same time as writing out all the field data for each topic, I also organised all the literature relevant to that theme into similar headings in order to look at the links between the two. As Glaser describes it,

"When the theory seems sufficiently grounded and developed, then we review the literature in the field and relate the theory to it through integration of ideas". (Glaser 1978, 31)

This involved, for example, comparing the parents' conception of 'opening up options' or their rejection of the idea of 'sameness' in girls and boys, with the published literature on androgyny and on the distinction between gender identity and sex role. It also involved considering the links between the parents' conceptions of non-sexist childrearing and the implications for non-traditional sex role socialisation of the three main theories of gender

identity acquisition outlined in chapter 2. This final stage of the analysis took the form of drawing conclusions and generating hypotheses, and the results are presented in the rest of this thesis.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE PARENTS AND THEIR BACKGROUND4.0 Introduction

Socialisation has been defined as involving the transmission of behaviour, roles, attitudes and beliefs to the next generation. (Weinreich 1978: 18). By attempting to socialise their children in a non-traditional way, the parents in this study were expressing a belief that they could consciously control this process and affect the kind of sex role behaviour, roles, attitudes and beliefs which their children developed. Many parents saw this as a gradual process and expected change to occur slowly over several generations.

"It's possible that it's the next generation, of children raised in a non-sexist way, that can actually raise their own children in . . . they will be the ones, because their own reflex actions will actually be different. Josh gets up from the table and as a matter of course brings his plate to the sink and rinses it - something my brother would never do." (Jeanne Rosen, son 8)

"I think change only happens slowly, over the course of generations, rather than people just taking decisions to change their way of life. I just hope I'll influence Brian and Philip a little bit, and hopefully they'll carry that on." (Jeff Brierley, sons 5 and 1½)

Given their emphasis on change through generations, it is obviously relevant to consider the parents' perception of their own upbringing. Sections two to six of this chapter examine the kind of experiences and relationships

that they see as having led them to decide to parent in a non-sexist way themselves, and I shall attempt to relate these experiences to their present conceptions of non-sexist childrearing. The first section of the chapter presents some background information on the housing, marital and occupational status of the families participating in the study, in order to provide the context within which these views were held.

4.1 The Parents

The majority of the parents in this study were white, middle-class, of above-average education and in their late twenties and thirties. Although largely homogenous in these respects, they varied considerably in terms of housing situation, income level and marital status. Eleven families owned their own house (varying from small terraced properties to large detached houses), three were renting from the council or private owners, and four lived in a variety of shared housing situations (joint ownership with another family of two houses, sharing their house in exchange for childcare, renting a house with another single parent family, or being a member of a living and working community). In terms of income, the families were fairly evenly spread between five high-income-earners, often where both parents were in full-time academic work; seven families who fell in the

middle range of income levels, and six finding it difficult to make ends meet, particularly single parents and manual workers. The majority of parents (ten couples) were married; three were single parents, and five were cohabiting, having either chosen not to marry, divorced but remained living together, or chosen to live with someone other than the child's parent. Most families departed to a greater or lesser extent from the stereotype of the nuclear family. The definition in the Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought, that a nuclear family 'consists solely of husband, wife and children and spans only two generations', would cover eight of the eighteen families. If the definition is tightened to include the expectation of monogamy and the pattern of male breadwinner/female at home, then the number is reduced to two.

The parents' occupations clustered in the academic area; lecturers, writers, teachers and research students, although the participants also included a factory worker, architect and printer (male) and an industrial editor, nuclear physicist and part-time builder (all female). Three women and one man were full-time at home caring for children, and another father had primary responsibility for domestic work and childcare but was also studying to be a doctor. Brief details of the individual families are presented in table 4.1, with real names altered to maintain confidentiality.

Parent/s Number	Parent names	Status & income	Occupation	Accommodation	Children
1	JILL HARRISON STEVEN HARRISON	Married High income	Researcher/post graduate student Lecturer in industrial relations	Own large house	Son, Keith, 4 Dtr. Vicky, 1½
2**	JANET O'BRIEN TONY O'BRIEN	Married High income	Sociology lecturer Maths teacher	Share their large house with another family in exchange for childcare.	Dtr. Sarah, almost 2 Another baby due (Emma)
3	ROSEMARY SIMPSON	Divorced single parent Low income	Full time at home (ex student)	Shares rented terraced house with another single parent and her two daughters	Dtr. Eve, 6
4	LYNN ELDRIDGE MICK ELDRIDGE	Married Low income	Full time at home (ex medical illustrator. Factory worker (ex geriatric nurse)	Terraced house bought for them by her parents.	Son, Paul 6 Dtr. Beth, 4
5	SUSAN DURRANT ANDREW DURRANT	Married High income	Lecturer Lecturer	Own detached house, Live-in au-pair	Dtr. Karen, 8 Son, Gary, 7 adopted and of mixed race.
6**	JENNY CHADWICK BOB PERKINS	Living together Low income	Student Printer	Council house	Twin daughters, Lucy and Becky, 3½
7	PATRICIA NOBLE JOHN NOBLE	Married Average income	Publicity editor Medical Student	Own terraced house in university town.	Dtr. Brenda 7 Dtr. Fiona 5
8	JANE MITCHELL IAN ROBINSON	Living together Low income	Freelance Writer/researcher Freelance Writer	Rent top half of large terraced house in a housing co-operative.	Dtr. Ellen, 2 Jane's 3 teenage children by a previous marriage.

TABLE 4.1 continued

DETAILS OF FAMILIES

Parent/s Number	Parent names	Status & income	Occupation	Accommodation	Children
9	PENNY GRIFFITHS ALAN PATTERSON	Married High income	Further Ed. teacher/researcher Scientific researcher in the textile industry.	Share large suburban house and a country house with another family.	Dtr. Kathryn, 3
10**	JEANNE ROSEN MIKE UNDERWOOD	Living tog. Average income	W.E.A. tutor Freelance writer	Own terraced house.	Jeanne's son, Josh 8.
11**	SHEILA WATSON	Divorced, single parent Low income	Student	Rented terraced house in university town.	Dtr. Joanna, 9
12	LIZ BATES MARK BATES	Married Average income	Postgraduate student Sociology lecturer	Own terraced house	Dtr. Rosie, 5
13	HELEN POWELL DEREK POWELL	Married, then divorced and living tog. Average income	Industrial editor Full time at home (ex-export salesman)	Own detached house.	Fostered 4 children from care for past year: Claire 12, Christopher 10, Susan 8, Richard 7.
14*	MARY LEWIS	Separated	Academic Assistant	Renting house until old house sold.	Son, David 11 Dtr. Olwen, 7
15*	ANNA BRIERLEY JEFF BRIERLEY	Married Average income	Full time at home (ex architect) Architect	Own detached house	Sons: Brian, 5 Philip 1½
16*	KAY THOMPSON OWEN THOMPSON	Married Average income	Part-time physicist Part-time physics teacher	Own detached house in village	Son, Gavin, 5½ Dtr. Bronwyn, 3½
17*	SUE MACMILLAN	Low income	Part-time builder	Lives with son in a living and working collective in a northern town - Sam's father is also part of the group.	Son, Sam 1¼

Parent/s Number	Parent names	Status & income	Occupation	Accommodation	Children
18*	SARAH EICHMANN CARL EICHMANN	Married High income	Supervisor at a children's centre Psychology lecturer	Own house	Son, Norman 6 months.

* Interviewed in 1982

** Case-study Family.

4.2 The Parents' own Childhood

When the parents talked about the relationship between their own upbringing and their desire to parent in a non-traditional way, there was little evidence of a clearcut connection between the two. They did not share a common perception of their childhood experience having directly affected their own behaviour as parents, for example. It was certainly not the case that they all felt they had themselves been reared in a non-sexist way. Some did perceive their own upbringing as 'feeding into' how they were trying to bring up their own children, or described their parents as being 'a very strong influence on the way we're bringing up the children', but others overtly rejected their parents' values and lifestyle, and felt either that their own upbringing had had little effect on their values as adults, or else that it had affected them through illustrating the limitations of traditional sex roles.

'Mother would have been a tremendous career woman. She loathed being at home with us children. When there was one child left at home she got a low-grade machine-operating job and was a supervisor within two years - it was ideally suited to her. Whereas my father was frustrated at work, he hated it. The reason I've come to be a feminist is because I've seen what it does to people. Instead of them being what they should have been because of their natural qualities, Mum was a chronic depressive and Dad was totally unfit for power games and politics. He hated going to work and was sacked every couple of years for lateness.' (Helen Powell)

This lack of an obvious pattern in the childhood experiences of the parents is not particularly surprising. There are a multitude of variables affecting the way in which children may be influenced by their upbringing, among them the personality of the child and her or his parents, the interaction of the two, other relationships within the family and the particular events in the life of each child. This complexity was one reason why I chose to focus in detail on one aspect of non-traditional socialisation, the input from parents, rather than attempting to correlate the parents' attitudes and behaviour with their children's scores on some measure of sex role stereotyping.

However, the complexity of the relationship which emerged between the parents' backgrounds and their wish to parent in a non-sexist way provided an interesting parallel with the way in which they conceived of non-sexist childrearing. It will become clear in later chapters that the majority of parents rejected a straightforward model of direct socialisation into non-traditional sex roles. They appeared more concerned to foster the kind of personality characteristics that would enable a child to depart from conventional sex-typed roles, than to 'shape' the child through non-traditional reinforcement patterns. In their own childhood, most parents had experienced the kind of reinforcement of traditional sex roles described by the

social learning theorists. As they grew up before the role of the Women's Liberation Movement, there was little popular awareness of the ways in which such roles were maintained by the media, toy provision, books, etc., and no non-sexist resources available had their parents wanted them. Their childhood experiences of their mothers as being primarily responsible for childcare and housework with their fathers perhaps 'helping out' occasionally, reflected a division of labour that had not been seriously questioned. Direct socialisation into non-traditional roles could thus not adequately account for the behaviour and values of the parents in this study. This linked with their own feeling as parents that altering traditional sex roles involved something more than giving sons dolls and daughters toolsets, or avoiding stereotyped images in books and television programmes. Janet O'Brien made the connection explicit in justifying her scepticism about the role of early conditioning in determining sex role attitudes.

"The traditional feminist point of view seems to say the early years are all-important and there's very little we can do after that, and I just think that's wrong. I don't think that explains how any of us ended up in the Women's Movement, because most of the people in the Women's Movement have been brought up very traditionally. I'm sure it's a far more conscious rejection of what we've seen, and if we can think about things then so can other people. People can consciously change their sex role at a later stage, without early conditioning necessarily having done them any great harm." (Janet O'Brien)

The 'something more' which they perceived seemed to involve an emphasis on changes in relationships rather than (or often in addition to) changes in reinforcement patterns. There were two aspects to the parents' stress on relationships. One was the importance of changes in the relationship between parent and child so that the child was seen as a separate individual rather than as an object to be moulded according to the parents' values. The second was the importance of changes in the relationship between men and women, so that women would be perceived as strong, resourceful and independent, and men as emotional and nurturant. Both these elements in the parents' conception of non-sexist childrearing were linked to their descriptions of their own upbringing.

4.3 Non-authoritarian Upbringing

A recurrent theme in the connections women drew between their upbringing and their current values was the degree of autonomy granted to them by their parents. They often felt they had been given an amount of liberty and independence that was unusual for the time.

"I was always encouraged to do what I wanted, to look things up for myself. They gave me a lot of responsibility and freedom to make my own decisions."
(Anna Brierley)

"I was given a lot of encouragement to be my own person and to succeed and to just generally do things . . . looking back, I had a fantastic amount

of liberty. My parents never censored books they thought were unsuitable for my age, and later they let me travel and go off by myself. Their attitude was 'it's your life', all along."
(Susan Durrant)

Although this emphasis was particularly evident in the women's accounts, several men also stressed the importance they attached to having had a free, easy relationship with their parents.

"I feel I had an easy upbringing. They didn't interfere too much, and didn't present me with too many feelings of guilt or being screwed up about sex and things." (Mark Bates)

The relevance of a non-authoritarian upbringing was underlined when considering the background of one father who had adopted some aspects of a more egalitarian lifestyle while rejecting or being unaware of any need for change in other areas. Steven Harrison described his father, a clergyman, as a dominant and authoritarian man who made him climb the tower of a 15th century church at night when he was five years old, and who made little attempt to hide his preference for sons.

"When his first child was a girl, he retreated to his study for two days. The two sons were the apple of his eye, and still are." (Steven Harrison)

As an adult, Steven did a share of housework and encouraged his wife Jill to go out to work, both of which he attributed to his own childhood - his mother returned to work when he was nine ('So I always had the image that my wife would work') and he had been expected to do his share of

the chores ('I was always housework-oriented. For me to do the washing and cleaning is not some great sacrifice on my part, earnestly dividing labour because of some overarching moral duty, its simply because that's the way it's panned out'). However in many respects the power relationship between him and Jill appeared little changed, and he seemed to value 'masculine' characteristics far more than so called 'feminine' ones. Steven's job took priority ('I'm the careerist in the family'), he was the one to discipline the children ('Jill's softer than I am, I'm certainly the authoritarian in the house') and he had a tendency to interrupt Jill and to refer to her as 'kid'. Unlike many parents, Steven felt that a non-sexist upbringing was easier with a boy than a girl, because it was easier for men to 'voluntarily come down from their superior position' than it was for women 'from their inferior position to go up, since they would need space to be made for them by the men'. It seemed as if Steven's upbringing had made possible certain of the practical aspects of living in a less sexist way but that the attitudes towards relationships which he had observed and absorbed in his family of origin were more traditional. For many parents in the study, however, a crucial part of non-sexist childrearing was attempting to create a more equal power relationship between men and women.

4.4 Images of Mothers

One of the themes which emerged most consistently from a consideration of the parents' upbringing was the perception, particularly by women, of their mothers as being strong and influential personalities.

'My mother was an old-fashioned feminist. She felt strongly about women having opportunities and the vote, and was chairman of a married women's organisation started after the war to ensure equal finance in marriage. She thought the facilities ought to be there, but that women should get credit for the stereotyped role.' (Kay Thompson)

'A lot of my feminism comes from my mother. She wouldn't say she was a feminist, but my sisters and I were never given remotely to think that it might have been better if we were boys or that there were other things open to boys that weren't open to us. She used to talk about women being men's intellectual equals, and how women could do intellectual professional jobs as well as men and should have the chance to do so.' (Jane Mitchell)

'My mother was a very strong-minded person with phenomenal energy. She was very frustrated because she was made to leave school early and did secretarial work, but her abilities were much greater.' (Susan Durrant)

'She is a generation ahead of her time, her mother and grandmother were as well. My maternal grandmother lived with us till I was twelve - she was always joking, it was fun having her there.' (Anna Brierley)

'My mother was always very much in favour of women's rights, all her family were. It was a very matriarchal kind of family, with lots of unmarried women - sisters, aunts, cousins - and most of them teachers. It was seen as important for a woman to be independent economically.' (Penny Griffiths)

Often their mothers had worked outside the home while their children were still young, at a time when this was

far less common or acceptable than it is today..

'She went back to work when I was about eight, which was very unusual then. I remember I had instructions not to tell anybody else!' (Susan Durrant)

'I remember being very proud of my mother being at college when I was at school.' (Kay Thompson)

'Both my parents are doctors. My mother is very much an academic, always got her nose in a book and hopeless at housework.' (Lynn Eldridge)

'My mother was part of that generation that stayed at home after the war, but she was keen to go back to work and did so when my youngest brother was six - that was unusual then.' (Penny Griffiths)

'My father died when I was two, which was the year my sister was born, and my mother went back to work in the civil service six months later. She saw us through school by working - she worked very hard and long. She's a factory inspector now, and her job takes her all over the country. When she comes here I think she finds us a bit boring because we don't go out every night till three in the morning!' (Jenny Chadwick)

Obviously not all of the women had had this kind of early experience. Sarah Eichman described her mother as 'quiet and self-effacing', Sue Macmillan remembered seeing her mother as the 'weak' one in the family and identifying with her strongly socialist and pacifist father, and Rosemary Simpson felt that 'my mother's view of herself is that she's there to back up my father and provide him with things . . . she's got to do the cooking and cleaning so he can get on and be creative . . . and she doesn't resent it at all!' But the overall impression was of women learning from their own mothers that women can be

capable and strong.

For the men in my study there was a similar but much less marked trend towards describing their mothers as being important in shaping their attitudes towards sexual equality. As with the women, their early experiences often led them to see their mothers as strong and capable. Often this was related to the fact that their father was not around and so their mother took on many of the traditionally 'masculine' functions in the home. Bob Perkin's father died when he was ten, and for the rest of his childhood he lived with his mother, aunt and sister. Owen Thompson's father had a stroke when he was young, and his mother took over most of the responsibilities for running the family. Sheila Watson said that her ex-husband's father had also died when he was ten, and that as a result his mother had become 'very emancipated, good with tools and with her hands'. Several of the men reported that their mothers had held outside employment after they started school. Sometimes the realisation of their mothers' capabilities came later, seeing her successfully start a business once the children were grown, or realising as Derek Powell did when he joined his father's business that his father was incompetent and that it was actually his mother who kept the family going:

'It changed my ideas dramatically. He'd always been the one who came home with the goodies and sweets, but I realised she was the one who'd managed everything.' (Derek Powell)

4.5 Encouragement to Succeed

Another common strand in the background of many women in the study was that they had been pushed to achieve by their parents. The women recalled that "they were insistent that I went to college" (Rosemary Simpson), that "they put a lot of pressure on me to achieve educationally" (Kay Thompson), that "they encouraged me to be very academic and always gave me the idea that when I got married and had children I would carry on working" (Patricia Noble).

A sizeable majority (eleven out of eighteen) of the women in the study were either only children or the eldest in the family, often an 'all-girl' family, and as such seemed to have benefitted from the kind of attention and encouragement to succeed that might well have been bestowed upon their brothers had they had any, or had they not been the first-born child. There was no such pattern in the men's position in their family of origin.

Although both parents encouraged daughters to do well at school, it was particularly fathers who were singled out as emphasising the importance of academic success and achievement. Researchers who have studied androgynous or career women (e.g. Baruch 1972, Kelly and Worell 1976)

have reported similar findings. The women in my study often perceived their fathers as regretting the educational opportunities they themselves had missed, and thought their fathers saw a chance of realising their ambitions through their daughters, especially if they were the eldest or the brightest.

'My father came from a working class background and didn't have the educational opportunities he'd have today and probably regretted the fact that he'd left school at fifteen. I can remember before I knew what university was, being told I was going to go to university, and from before I knew what a doctorate was, being told I was going to get a doctorate.'
(Janet O'Brien)

'My parents were ambitious for all of us. My father came from a working class family and he was the only one to make it to university, and they wanted us to get there too.' (Penny Griffiths)

'We were pushed to achieve educationally. It was the lever out of our situation - we were a very poor family of six in the East End docklands and my father had never had the chance of an education.'
(Helen Powell)

'I think one of the things that was very important was that my father had come out very badly in his education. He was very bright but there were only three grammar school places so he left school at fourteen. He felt strongly that we children should have the chance that he never had, and so he was tremendously supportive, of me particularly as the eldest and I suppose the brightest.' (Susan Durrant)

4.6 Images of Fathers

Aside from encouraging their daughter's educational aspirations, however, fathers were perceived as having played a fairly minimal role in the development of non-traditional sex role behaviour and attitudes in their

children. Although several women described themselves as having a close relationship with their father as a child, this was not a dominant theme and appeared far less significant to them than their perception of their mother and the role she had played in the family. Few fathers had shared housework or childcare to any extent. Fathers appeared to be far less salient in their children's accounts of how they developed the desire to parent in a non-sexist way. This was particularly the case for the men in the project. Their fathers had frequently been physically absent, as described earlier, or when present were often described as emotionally unavailable.

'My father inherited a small paint manufacturing business, and that's been his life. He was totally immersed in work. He travelled away a lot and was involved in committees - the rotary club and the sailing club. He was always in transit, in for a meal and then out for a meeting. I never got to know him. I still don't know him. My parents couldn't talk to each other, and they certainly couldn't talk to us.' (Jeff Brierley)

As I shall demonstrate in later chapters, the parents in this study expressed greater unease and confusion about raising sons in a non-sexist way. It appears plausible that one of the reasons for their ambivalence was their lack of experience of men behaving in non-traditional ways. There was little in most of the parents' own childhood experiences on which they could build to create

a model of a non-sexist male, and most were less clear about what this would involve.

'I see it as prevent myself from coming out with the clichés, more so than pushing him in a direction we don't know that much about, I mean in terms of role models for boys not being really quite defined.' (Jeane Rosen, son 10½)

The Suffragist tradition and the struggle for women's rights have set a precedent for questioning aspects of the feminine role, but a consciousness of the need for change in the masculine role too is a relatively recent phenomenon arising from the emphasis on the importance of change in relationships as well as on the need for equal opportunities. The majority of parents in the research project reflected this consciousness by stressing the importance of fathers being closely involved with their children, so that they would have experienced men as nurturers and home makers if they became parents themselves. However some of the difficulties parents encountered in trying to involve men equally in the emotional care and responsibility for children can perhaps also be traced back to the lack of men behaving in non-traditional ways, which characterised the childhood experiences of both the men and the women in this study.

4.7 Change through Women

A final theme in the parents' descriptions of their own upbringing, which also appeared to be connected to their

confusion about non-sexist childrearing for boys, was the way in which the non-sexist ideals of the women were more closely grounded in their lives and experiences than were those of the men. The mothers in the study could often look back and trace the development of their ideas through significant people and events from their childhood onwards. Apart from the role played by their mother, many of the women mentioned as an important factor their growing awareness, either through reading or through their own experiences, of the discrimination and oppression of women.

'I read Simone de Beauvoir when it came out, I must have been in the sixth form at school, and it was an incredibly powerful influence.'
(Penny Griffiths)

'My ideas have changed slowly I think, through the things I've done and the people I've met. I started working in a Women's Aid refuge, at first from the policy angle because I was interested in social work and there was little being done for battered wives, and then I slowly developed a feminist perspective.'
(Mary Lewis)

'When I first started working in the early sixties I'd see men come into our company as management trainees and get promoted, when I knew I was a lot brighter - that used to really annoy me!'
(Sheila Watson)

'When I was about nine or ten my uncle came to live with my mother and us, and he never did anything about the house, not even the traditional male things. The injustice of it all used to really rile me. We could see my mother going out to work and then coming back and doing all the housework - we did a lot more than other children, which seemed only fair because she

was working - but he never did anything!
 Another formative thing in my life was not being able to earn enough money for my college course, because in Ireland no Irish student had a grant. One summer I worked in a Butlin's factory - I mean holiday camp! - doing waitressing, and was getting four pounds ten shillings a week while men who were doing exactly the same work were getting seven pounds fifteen shillings, and they were getting twice as much in tips! I've been aware of that kind of discrimination I suppose all my life. I think it was mainly the economic thing and the lack of opportunities that brought it home first of all.' (Jenny Chadwick)

For some women this awareness of oppression was highlighted by the arrival of a child.

'College didn't change me much. What changed me most was when I left college and my husband was working and I had a child all to myself, and suddenly . . . it changed me quite a lot I think. I'd sort of gone along with things before that, accepted things and not really questioned or thought about anything much, but I suddenly started resenting, not the fact that I'd got a child, but that society doesn't work when you've got a child, everything's loaded onto you and you're not expected to do anything except look after a child and a home. I think that had the biggest effect on me!' (Rosemary Simpson)

'When Josh was born things became much more polarised. I was forced into realising what was happening. And also the Women's Movement began around the same time.' (Jeanne Rosen)

Other women identified particular people as having been important in giving them the confidence to carry on with a non-traditional interest or career; a good maths teacher at school who encouraged Patricia Noble in her interest in science, a tutor at university who (unlike the other lecturers) did not ignore or put down Kay Thompson because

she was a woman studying physics but instead encouraged her to go on to do research, a colleague in Anna Brierley's first job as an architect who gave her confidence by believing in her and her work.

Few men, on the other hand, were able to draw such links between their current ideas and their personal history. The trend towards strong mothers, although discernible, was far less marked than for the women in the study. Some men could and did point to particular experiences which had made them re-evaluate their ideas. For Bob Perkins, this was joining the Communist Party in 1968, for Alan Patterson going to university and getting involved in left-wing politics ('I changed about 720°!'), for Tony O'Brien also going to university ('It was a real eye-opener for me!') Almost all of the significant events which men described took place in their adult lives rather than in their childhood, and there was little in the father's descriptions of their upbringing that could help to account for their wish to bring up their own child in a non-stereotyped way. The one common thread which did connect their accounts of how they developed their non-sexist ideals was the influence of the women they had known. While their husband or partner was sometimes mentioned by the women as one source of influence on their ideas among many, for most of the men it was their partner

or other women who seemed to have been the key factor in leading them to adopt an egalitarian ideology.

'I think it's something that's come into my consciousness through Susan, and into her consciousness through the Women's Movement.'
(Andrew Durrant)

'The Women's Movement through Helen.' (Derek Powell)

'I learnt a lot from women friends who had broken marriages and used me as a confidante. A couple of them had kids, and I learnt a lot about 'women's problems' before I learnt about the Women's Movement.' (Mike Underwood)

It seemed as though the men's consciousness of the need for sex role change was less rooted in their own experiences than it was for most of the women. It could be that the more detailed links which the women drew between their current ideas and their past experiences were a reflection of the emphasis in the Women's Liberation Movement on the relationship between the personal and the political, and that the men's relative inability to link their personal history and their desire for sex role change in this way was more because they had not thought about the issues to the same extent as the women, than because there was no such connection. Nevertheless, the emphasis in most men's accounts on the role of significant women in affecting their attitudes suggests that a crucial factor in the decision to try to parent in a less sexist way is an awareness of the inequalities and oppression that result from sex role stereotyping (which links with these parents' attempts to make their own children aware and

critical of such stereotyping, rather than trying to shield them from it). In a male-dominated society it is hardly surprising that such consciousness is more acute in women, and that a consideration of the backgrounds of these parents therefore reinforces the impression gained from the parents' description of their own childrearing policies; that it is often women (in the role of mothers, partners or more generally through the influence of the Women's Liberation Movement) who are the motivating force behind attempts at sex role change.

4.8 SUMMARY

An analysis of the parent's descriptions of their own upbringing revealed several common threads in their accounts. One was that both women and men had generally been socialised themselves into traditional sex roles as children, at least in terms of the kind of direct reinforcement they received for such roles through books and toy provision. However they often, especially the women, reported being allowed much freedom to develop their own ideas, and felt their individuality had been respected by their parents. A second common trend was the way in which many women had been encouraged to achieve educationally and to see success as desirable and appropriate for them. A third theme, again more

prominent in the women's accounts, was their perception of their mothers as strong, resourceful people, and the lack of fathers acting in non-traditional ways. Finally, there appeared to be a much stronger connection between the women's upbringing and their values as parents.

Their desire to bring up their children in a non-sexist way seemed to be more strongly rooted in their own experiences than that of the men, who often identified women as the motivating force behind their own desire for sex role change.

These themes in the parents' backgrounds were linked in several respects with the way in which they hoped to socialise their own children. These issues are analysed in greater depth in chapters six to eight and eleven, and include the parents' rejection of a simple model of direct socialisation into non-traditional sex roles, their concern with the quality of the relationship between parent and child, their greater ambivalence about what non-traditional sex role socialisation should involve for boys, and their emphasis on change through women, and for daughters.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCEPTIONS OF NON-SEXIST CHILDREARING

5.0 Introduction

This chapter explores some of the philosophical and psychological ideas underlying the concept of non-traditional sex role socialisation. It examines what non-sexist childrearing meant to the parents in this study, how they perceived the relationship between the various aspects of sexual identity, and the way that their non-sexist beliefs interrelated with other philosophical ideas such as freedom of choice.

5.1 Masculine, feminine, androgynous?

The parents recruited for this study were all concerned that their children be brought up in a non-sexist way, but they were not selected for inclusion on the basis of any detailed conception of what such an upbringing should involve. One of the aims of the research was to investigate the range of meanings and definitions attached to the concept of non-sexist childrearing. It is possible, for instance, that it be conceived of as trying to reverse traditional sex roles so that boys became what we now see as feminine and girls masculine. Another possibility would be to maintain the traditional distinctions but to teach that boys and girls are of equal worth - the "equal

but different" point of view. Yet another would be to try to make both sexes more alike, either by encouraging the 'feminine' qualities or the 'masculine' ones, or some new combination of the two. A fourth would be to envisage freeing children from stereotypes as encouraging the particular strengths of each child (even sex-typed characteristics), regardless of what sex the child happened to be. There has never been any consensus in the literature as to what 'non-sexist childrearing' means, not surprisingly given the paucity of research and written work in the area and the complexity of the issues. Letty Pogrebin in her popular book for parents describes it as "a commitment by a parent or other caring adult to helping children be free of sex role constraints and free to discover the very best in themselves" (Pogrebin 1980, xi). Gloria Hirsch states that "it attempts to create the equality (not sameness) of the sexes - legally, socially, educationally, psychologically, politically, religiously, economically - in and out of the home" (Hirsch 1974, 160).

The definition which emerged from the parents' accounts was clear; they equated non-sexist childrearing with the creation of more opportunities for their child. They adopted an androgynous conception of sex roles as as defined by Bem, (1974), although few used that term

themselves. They talked instead about 'giving opportunities', 'opening up options' and 'developing all her potential'.

They wanted children to have access to a whole range of behaviour and emotions, rather than having half of experience denied to them because it was 'inappropriate' for their sex.

'I see it in terms of giving opportunities really, in terms of not being circumscribed by a particular role. As having the chance of adopting a role that fits her talents, not being put off doing something just because it's not sex-appropriate.'
(Tony O'Brien, daughter 2)

'Children should be allowed to become whatever they have the possibility of becoming, without being put into two completely separate boxes.'
(Susan Durrant, daughter 8, son 7)

'I think, particularly with girls, it's opening up possibilities to them. I didn't consider that the whole world was open to me, and I want them to feel that it is, that there is nothing they can't do if that is what they really want to do. That's the main thing, that they should feel they've got all the opportunities.'
(Jenny Chadwick, twin daughters aged 3)

There was little evidence of the view often put forward by those antagonistic to the Women's Liberation Movement that feminism means trying to be more like men and trying to gain equal access to the privileges of a male world. The parents in this study were aware of the unequal status of men and women in our present society, and I shall suggest later that this affected how far they were prepared to carry out their non-sexist policies with boys, but their goals for sons and daughters were very similar, involving an emphasis on the positively-valued

characteristics of both the traditional 'masculine' and 'feminine' roles rather than a stress on 'masculine' qualities at the expense of 'feminine' ones, or vice versa.

'Some people would see the idea of bringing up girls as not encouraging them to be interested in dolls and babies and people, whereas I would see that as quite important for both men and women, to be interested in the nurturant side.'

(Janet O'Brien, daughter 2)

'I'd like both boys and girls to be independent and think for themselves, and be able to be caring and sensitive.'

(Rosemary Simpson, daughter 6)

'I think girls should learn to become more assertive and more self-determining, taking charge of their own lives, and boys learn to be more caring and nurturing. That's the sort of change I'd like to see.'

(Sheila Watson, daughter 9)

'A balanced person, someone who has both characteristics.'

(Mike Underwood; boy 8)

It was evident that the parents were still thinking in terms of 'masculine' and 'feminine', and were trying to combine these characteristics rather than to abolish the categories themselves. The notion of masculinity and femininity has a long history. Male and female as opposing principles occur regularly in philosophy, religion and mythology, as the symbols of Yin and Yang in Chinese Taoism, the Monad and Dyad in the Pythagorean Table of Opposites, the animus and anima archetypes in Jungian psychology, and more recently in the kind of categories

psychologists have used to classify ways of relating in the world: agency and communion (Bakan 1966), outer space and inner space (Erikson 1964), instrumentality and expressiveness (Parsons and Bales 1955), field independence and field dependence (Witkin 1974), autocentric and allocentric (Gutmann 1965). Bern's model of androgyny, which comes closest to describing the aims and ideals of the parents in this study, is based on the premise that there are identifiable 'masculine' and 'feminine' attributes, which can however be combined in one individual rather than the 'masculine' values being seen as appropriate only for males and the 'feminine' ones for females. This model has recently been criticised on the grounds that such a dualistic notion of masculinity and femininity blinds us to seeing new kinds of personality and behaviours, such as a 'gentle dominance' or an 'emotional rationality'. (Kaplan and Bean 1976)

'Androgyny includes masculine and feminine traits but moves beyond them to a third integrated dimension . . . it is the flexibility and union of positively valued traits that is critical for the model.'
(Kaplan and Bean 1976)

Other researchers have argued similarly that there is a need to move beyond this dualistic notion of masculinity and femininity, and to view androgyny less as a combination of two separate roles than as a state which transcends the categories of 'masculine' and 'feminine' altogether.

(Rebecca et al 1976, Ferguson 1977) However, there are difficulties with such a suggestion, not least the linguistic handicap of describing such personalities and behaviours when, as Kaplan and Bean themselves point out,

'the labels to signify the integration of male and female behaviour must be invented'.

(Kaplan and Bean 1976, 3) ¹

5.2 Gender Identity, Sex Role, Sexual orientations

Despite holding the same ideals for boys and girls, the parents in the study resisted a definition of non-sexist childrearing that saw it as making girls and boys more 'similar'. They did want to minimise the differences between the sexes imposed by sex role stereotypes, but at the same time they did not want to talk about making boys and girls 'the same'.

'I don't think I'd put it quite that way, though it probably comes to the same thing. I see it in terms of increasing each child's individual competence in as many areas as possible, both boys and girls. Which I suppose would probably end up with them coming out more similar.'

(Janet O'Brien, daughter 2)

'I think this thing about sameness is very loaded. People are terribly frightened of it . . . for that reason I wouldn't use that word. The equality should be in terms of power, rather than the same.'

(Jeanne Rosen, son 8)

Footnote 1:

I shall continue to use the terms 'masculine' and 'feminine' in the rest of this paper, not least because of the linguistic handicap Kaplan and Bean refer to in attempting to avoid them. By placing them in inverted commas I hope to indicate that they are not to be taken as undisputed facts of existence,

Footnote 1 continued:

with 'masculine' describing behaviours that are appropriate for males and 'feminine' those for females, but rather that they are being used as convenient and commonly-understood terms of reference for particular attributes and behaviours.

Their unease about the idea of a 'unisex' child could be explained at one level as a reflection of the realities of living in a society where sex is a basic categorising device. One of the first things parents are told about a newborn child is whether it is a girl or a boy. Researchers who have investigated sex differences in adult-child interaction by asking subjects to interact with a baby of unspecified sex have found that most people express a good deal of unease and go to great lengths to find out whether the child is a girl or a boy. (Seavey et al 1975).

Femininist writers have had to exercise great ingenuity in envisaging utopian societies where this basic classification by sex is either unimportant or non-existent.

(Ursula Le Guin 1975, Charlotte Gilman Perkins 1979, Marge Piercy 1979) The non-sexist parents in this study were all aware of the importance society attaches to the knowledge of a person's sex.

'There's no way you can have them not male or female, there's no way anyone knows how to relate to someone when they don't know their sex.'
(John Noble, daughters 7 and 5)

'I suppose its always going to matter in how you work your life out, whether you're going to bear children and what you do with them. Girls very young are affected by that knowledge. It's hard

to conceive of not knowing there was any difference.'
(Sue Macmillan, son 15 months)

However their ambivalence about the concept of sameness appeared to reflect more than an acknowledgement of the practical difficulties involved in not categorising a child as male or female. Most parents felt that it was important, at a basic psychological level, for children to know to which sex they belonged. They saw themselves as trying to undo sex stereotypes, but without undermining the child's sense of self. Knowledge of one's sex was, in the parents' eyes, an important part of a person's identity and self-concept. Psychologists, psychoanalysts and those working with gender-disturbed individuals have stressed the same point (e.g. Money and Tucker 1975, Kaplan and Sedney 1980, 208; Stockard and Johnson 1980, 127). Typical is psychologist Judith Bardwick's comment that:

'There can be sex-role transcendence, but there cannot be a gender-identity transcendence. People are neither neuter nor things. While there are many other components of identity, gender is still critical.' (Bardwick 1979, 167)

The conceptual distinction between sex role and gender identity proved helpful in understanding the way in which these parents thought about non-sexist childrearing. They wanted to encourage their children to develop a secure gender-identity, without this necessarily being based on conformity to a traditional sex role.

'I'm not trying to bring up a child who's neither girl nor boy, so much as trying to bring up a child who isn't over-preoccupied with appearances, feeling made to do a whole range of things because she's a girl - or on the other hand, competitive, over-confident, irresponsible in terms of domestic work because he's a boy.'

(Jane Mitchell, daughter 2 and three teenage children)

'I think it's important the child still knows that he's a boy or that she's a girl, but that the boy be free to evolve his feminine side, and the girl her masculine side.'

(Mike Underwood, boy 8)

'It's important to recognise and appreciate what you are, without feeling bad about it because you don't conform to the stereotypes.'

(Anna Brierley, sons 5 and 1½)

What non-sexist childrearing meant for the majority of parents was trying to disentangle the various aspects of sexual identity, in particular gender identity and sex role, so that their child could develop a secure sense of being female or male without having to acquire this identity through adhering rigidly to 'masculine' or 'feminine' behaviour. They felt it was important that the child knew and was comfortable with its sex, but that this did not constrain their behaviour.

Most parents had thought much less about the third component of sexual identity, sexual orientation. Few were making any conscious attempt to break down heterosexist as well as sexist assumptions in order to offer their child more sexual as well as sex role options. They did however view

sexual orientation as a separate, distinct aspect of sexual identity. They did not hold the view often expressed in the popular press that sexual orientation is somehow inextricably tied to a person's gender identity and sex role. Rice reports the case of two Baptist Ministers in America who objected to the Equal Rights ruling that schools should offer home economics and industrial arts to both boys and girls on the grounds that

'by having a young boy cook or sew, wearing an apron, we're pushing him into homosexuality . . . you take some boys that have homosexual tendencies and this could be the thing that tips the scales.'
(Rice 1975)

Nearer home, and as recently as 1983, the Conservative education spokesman for Brent was reported to disagree with a policy of encouraging girls to do physics and boys biology since

'Boys and girls were biologically different. Efforts to change things would have no effect except to turn boys into 'hermaphrodites and queers.'
(Wilce 1983)

In contrast, all of the parents in this research project expressed the view that sex role and sexual orientation were quite distinct. They were clear that minimising the distinctions in behaviour and attitudes between girls and boys, or encouraging 'cross-sex' characteristics, was not going to develop homosexual preferences in a child.

'I think people are still very afraid of homosexuality. I really see that as a core thing that makes parents very heavy about sex roles. I think it would help a lot if people were generally more aware of how that comes about, that they're actually helping both sexes if they let boys be more nurturant and girls be assertive.'

(Penny Griffiths, daughter 3)

'I think that's a load of bullshit. It's the kids who are so put upon to be butch or whatever that get screwed up about their sexuality because they'll never be as male or female as the expectations of them.'

(Sarah Eichmann, son 6 months)

However, as the use of a term like 'screwed up about their sexuality' suggests, not all of the parents felt they would feel comfortable if their own child did reject heterosexual relationships.

'I'm sure I wouldn't feel neutral if he was gay. I wouldn't climb the wall and tear my hair out and commit suicide and all that, but it wouldn't be a neutral issue for me.'

(Sarah Eichmann, son 6 months)

'I think I'd find it very difficult if she came home and said look, I'm interested in girls, I'm a lesbian and that's the way I want to make my life.'

(Jill Harrison, son 4, daughter 1½)

Other parents adopted a more accepting stance, and thought they 'wouldn't mind' if, when their child grew up, they preferred to relate sexually to others of the same sex. They said it 'didn't bother' them, that it was up to the child and that they wouldn't mind providing he or she were happy.

'I suppose I want him to have a warm relationship, or relationships, when he grows up, but I hope it wouldn't matter whether that was with men or with women.' (Sue Macmillan, son 15 months)

'If they turn out to be homosexual, the world certainly won't end.'

(Kay Thompson, son 5½, daughter 3½)

'If he became gay, it wouldn't bother me, though I'd probably wonder why. There's a man in my counselling group who's gay and he's a great guy. But what I would hate most about it is the sort of hurts they would receive from it.'

(Jeff Brierley, sons 5 and 1½)

However none of the parents expressed the parallel view that they might 'wonder why' their son (or daughter) became heterosexual, nor did any report actually presenting homosexuality to their child as a positive choice, in the same way that they presented non-traditional sex role behaviour. (My sample did not include any homosexual parents who may well have behaved differently.) They were likely to counter the story book stereotype of families as a husband and wife with children, for example, but they would rarely question the assumption that such a couple consisted of a woman and a man.

'I told him, when you grow up you might want to live on your own, you might want to live with a woman or marry her, but you don't have to get married ever if you don't want to.'

(Jeanne Rosen, son 8)

(The same mother talked about her feelings about her son entering puberty as being a time 'when he'll start being interested in the opposite sex'.)

'I try to put an alternative point of view all the time. Like with families, she keeps asking who of our friends are married, because a lot of them aren't and are living together and have children, and it's good for her to know that they're not married and have got different names,

'and sometimes the children have got different names as well.'

(Rosemary Simpson, daughter 6)

When parents did raise the possibility of adults choosing to live with someone of the same sex, this appeared to be in response to the child's questioning rather than a deliberate presentation of alternative ideas, and it elicited tolerance rather than approval.

'I find when reading stories and changing sex around that I sometimes end up with couples of the same sex getting married and living happily ever after. Sarah has commented on this occasionally, and I say that it can happen, it's O.K. - but I certainly don't push it in the way I do role-reversal etc.'

(Janet O'Brien, daughters 5 and 2)

They thus viewed gender identity, sex role and sexual orientation as three separate aspects of acquiring a sexual identity, but in their attempts to socialise their children in non-traditional ways, they focussed in particular on the first two, and were less concerned to present their children with alternatives to heterosexuality.

5.3 Non-sexist versus Liberal

A consistent theme which emerged from an analysis of the parent's aims and ideals was the relationship between their non-sexist and the other values underlying their childrearing philosophy. The majority of parents held their non-sexist beliefs as part of a general philosophy of life which could be described as liberal, permissive,

open and tolerant. They emphasised the child's autonomy and ability to make their own choices and decisions.

Most parents thought that if their child really wanted to fit into a traditional sex role then they would not try to prevent that, provided they felt that it was a choice rather than a channeling into an 'appropriate' role.

'I'd like to bring them up to be free to do what they want and to feel that if there's anything they want to do they can do it. If they really want to have a traditional home, if they want to have their children and not go out to work, then that's up to them. They have had the choice, and if that's the choice they want to make, then it's their choice.'

(Patricia Noble, daughters 7 and 5)

'I think I'd take a laissez-faire, liberal point of view that she can be whatever she likes, so long as she's had a range of opportunities or possibilities open to her.'

(Janet O'Brien, daughter 2)

'I would like to feel that they develop all their potentials, whatever they may be. It may turn out that perhaps their potential lies in fairly conventional sexually-stereotyped roles, but I think they must feel that there is absolutely nothing that they cannot do because they are either a boy or a girl. The only difference is the possibility of Karen producing a child and Gary fathering a child, and that's absolutely the only difference.'

(Susan Durrant, daughter 8, son 7)

This concept of a 'free choice' appeared to involve a rational consideration of the alternatives, with the parents' role being to ensure that the child was aware of all the options through the provision of alternative playthings and role models and through discussing and

questioning stereotypes. However, several contradictions were inherent in this notion of 'free choice'. One was the fact that despite their reluctance to impose their values upon their children, most parents did have definite ideas about the kind of people they would like their children to become, and these ideals sometimes conflicted with their children's desires and wishes. The strong pressures towards conformity exerted by the rest of society often meant that children's choices were not ones of which their parents approved.

'I think its a real problem, the conflict between being fairly liberal and allowing them freedom of choice and to have their own tastes, and not having them develop tastes you don't want them to develop.'

(Jill Harrison, son 4, daughter 1½)

The conflict was particularly acute if children wanted to buy toys which their parents disapproved of with their own pocket money:

'I'd find that very difficult. The libertarian side of me says 'you should allow them what they want' and the other side of me says 'you can't have that'. I think I'd end up talking about it.'

(Jill Harrison, son 4, daughter 1½)

'I do feel guilty about it because as they say to me: its our money and you tell us we're allowed to do what we like with our money and here you go laying down rules . . . we have discussions about it, and say when you're older if this is really want you want I won't be able to stop you, but I think you should know that I feel very strongly about this and why. I used to think you could be neutral, but I've realised you have to take a stance, and that may involve you in doing things which conflict with other principles like 'children

should make up their own minds', because you realise that they're in no position to make up their own minds because of the amount of rubbish they're getting from everybody else.'

(Susan Durrant, daughter 8, son 7)

The solution most parents had found to the dilemma was to make their own values explicit, but at the same time to encourage the child to question and criticise their views for themselves.

'My line seems to be that I try and give her the groundwork and then leave her to make her own decisions. That's the theory, though in fact I think its inevitable I exercise a lot of control and that she shares a lot of ideas with me. But I do encourage her to be critical, so that when the time comes she can even look at those ideas and say I don't think those are for me - and I hope that would be okay.'

(Sheila Watson, daughter 9)

The implications of this strategy in terms of the traditional theories of sex role socialisation are explored further in chapter seven.

A second dilemma posed by the notion of free choice was that certain choices effectively closed off other, perhaps more important, ones. Opting out of scientific subjects early on in a girl's secondary school career could significantly limit her ability to follow a non-traditional occupation. Choosing to marry and have children rather than acquire further training after leaving school closes off many other opportunities to women later in life.

'It's one thing to say, if she wants to be a fulltime housewife then let her go ahead and do it, but often it doesn't work out that way. After two or three years the baby's growing and the woman realises she's trapped and it's too late for her to do anything. So I think we'd make a strong stand and press for her to get some kind of skills which she could always use or fall back on later, if she decided to be a housewife.'

(Andrew Durrant, daughter 8, son 7)

'If she wanted to do something at say 15 or 16 which meant she was irrevocably finished with all sorts of other things, then I think I'd try and persuade her not to.'

(Penny Griffiths, daughter 3)

'I don't want her to get married too early, or settle into any kind of permanent relationship too young.'

(Sheila Watson, daughter 9)

'The idea of her getting pregnant at sixteen and thinking that getting married is really great would really worry me.'

(Liz Bates, daughter 5)

It was apparent that there was far more concern with the ways in which girls could be handicapped by traditional sex role stereotypes, and less emphasis on the limiting potential of such roles for boys. This theme is explored in more depth in Chapter 11.

The third contradiction inherent in the parents attempts to combine non-sexism with the notion of free choice, is that its application is severely limited in a society that is structured around inequalities of sex, race and class. In such a situation, the ability of those in underprivileged groups to make choices is restricted by

their subordinate position. Many parents acknowledged a relationship between personal and structural change and saw political activity as an integral part of their non-sexist childrearing policy. This issue is also taken up in greater detail later, in Chapter 11.4.

5.4 SUMMARY

Several themes emerged from an analysis of the parents' aims and ideals in relation to non-traditional sex role socialisation. The first was that they thought of non-sexist childrearing as fostering an androgynous personality in their children, rather than as attempting to make both sexes equally 'masculine' or 'feminine' or as encouraging a role reversal. The second was the conceptual distinction most parents made between the various aspects of sexual identity, so that they thought it was important that a child feel secure in the knowledge that it was male or female but not be constrained by this label in terms of behaviour or personality. Their position could be summed up as encouraging their child to develop a stable gender identity, opening up the child's conception of an appropriate sex role to include both positively valued 'masculine' and 'feminine' traits, and extending the bounds of sexual orientation to include a liberal tolerance rather than any radical encouragement of alternatives to heterosexuality.

Finally, there was a strong emphasis in the parents' accounts on liberal, non-authoritarian values, and the importance of encouraging children to form their own opinions, though this sometimes led them into contradictions or dilemmas.

CHAPTER SIXPatterns of Reinforcement: Toys, clothes, books, television6.0 Introduction

One method of non-traditional sex role socialisation would be to manipulate the child's environment in order to reinforce different kinds of behaviour from those normally seen as appropriate for girls and boys. This is the course of action suggested by Social Learning theory, altering the models presented to children in books and on television, giving both sexes access to the same toys and games, avoiding extremes of 'masculine' or 'feminine' dress and hairstyle, encouraging and rewarding the child for non-stereotyped behaviour and avoiding traditionally sex-typed patterns of reinforcement so that children do not see a whole range of behaviours and emotions as closed off to them just because of their sex.

The early feminist movement enthusiastically took up the implications of social learning theory, and many of its recommendations for change were based on an implicit acceptance of the behaviourist principles underlying social learning theory. Consciousness-raising groups explored the effects of women's early conditioning, studies documented the sex role stereotyping evident in the media through content analyses of childrens' books, television programmes and advertisements; pressure was put on publishers to provide non-sexist guidelines for their authors, and specifically anti-sexist reading

and teaching material was produced, often by womens' groups. This emphasis on the power of conditioning by the Women's Movement, plus the fact that altering traditional patterns of reinforcement offers an immediate and concrete way of attempting to bring about sex role change, makes it likely that attempts to control the child's environment will figure prominently in accounts of non-traditional sex role socialisation. Certainly the two American childrearing manuals offering specifically non-sexist advice to parents draw heavily on the premises of social learning theory, and reserve a prominent place for their chapters entitled in the one case 'Deprogramming the culture: togs, T.V. and toys' (Carmichael 1977), and in the other 'The Pink and Blue Blues', 'Dolls, dolls, dolls', and 'The toy curriculum' (Greenberg 1978).

The parents in my study had obviously assimilated this emphasis on the role of toys, clothes, books and television in the development of traditional sex roles. These were generally the first topics parents raised when asked a general question about what they were aware of doing to minimise sex role stereotyping, even if it subsequently emerged that they did little to modify the child's environment in terms of toy provision, etc., and were in fact more concerned with other aspects of non-

sexist childrearing. In this chapter I shall consider the part played by non-traditional reinforcement in the parents' attempts to bring up their children in a less sex-stereotyped way, and then show how for the majority of parents the behaviouristic elements of social learning theory rendered it inadequate as a description of their policy on sex role change.

6.1 Toys and Play

Feminists have drawn attention to the relationship between the kind of toys children are given to play with and the stereotyped expectations of their future role as adults. They have argued that giving girls dolls, household equipment and fashion accessories prepares them for a domestic role as wife and mother; giving boys scientific and mechanical toys and outdoor equipment prepares them for a role in the outside world of work and power. In the children's story 'William's Doll', written to counteract traditional sex role stereotypes, William's grandmother directly connects the provision of dolls with the learning of nurturing skills, when she tells William's father that:

'He needs a doll to hug and kiss and to cradle and to take to the park so that when he's a father like you he'll know how to take care of his baby'. (Zolotow, 1972)

Many parents in the research project drew similar connections.

"I feel it's terribly important. If you walk into a toyshop it's full of war toys for boys and domestic toys for girls, and it sums up society the way it is. This is the way children are being socialised, it's alright for boys to be taught to kill and to hurt and I think it's terrible, it makes me feel sick. I try not to go into toy shops, I get so angry'.
(Susan Durrant; daughter 8, son 7)

Their policy over toy provision was not to deny the child traditionally sex-typed toys, but rather to offer them 'opposite-sex' toys as well. In line with their aim of 'opening up options' and their reluctance to use censorship, they saw non-sexist childrearing as providing both boys and girls with toys traditionally seen as appropriate for only one sex, rather than as discouraging sex-typed play.

'With his older daughter, Bob stressed male-oriented toys, and we think now that was a mistake. I can show you a whole cupboardful of toys; there's a trainset in there, a battleship half-made, a carpenter's set, all this sort of thing. We feel that was a bit too artificial, that really you're not trying to stop them having toys so much as opening up things which are closed to them. So now they've got a Wendy house, little prams to wheel their dolls around in, a thing for sweeping carpets which I got in a jumble sale for 5p - and they've also got a train set and some cars, and a toolkit.'
(Jenny Chadwick, twin daughters 3½)

'We try not just to give them girls' toys, but to give them toys which are mechanical, and to encourage them to do outdoor things and things girls aren't always encouraged to do, like mending a puncture. They have lots of construction toys, mainly because I enjoy them, and lots of dolls too.'
(Patricia Noble, daughters 7 and 5)

Such 'a solution obviously depends on having an income adequate to buy a varied selection of toys. One mother I spoke to felt that the issue of what toys, clothes and books she should provide to help her young daughter learn less stereotyped sex roles was largely irrelevant, since she couldn't afford to buy things new and 'she just gets things passed on'. (Jane Mitchell, daughter 2)

There were some toys that parents didn't like their children having - guns and war toys, fashion dolls and 'Girl's World', cheap 'trashy' toys or over-priced consumer-oriented toys - but they objected to these for both sexes. Not many were as selective as the father who remarked half-jokingly that there were few toys he would happily buy for his two-year-old daughter:

'I try and avoid dolls, because they encourage such a traditional female role, and guns because they're anti-pacifist, and I'm not very keen on cars either, for environmental and social reasons - I don't want her to grow up thinking that the be-all and end-all is to have a V-registered Volvo. That doesn't leave very much!'
(Tony O'Brien)

Usually where parents favoured opposite-sex toys over same-sex ones, this was an attempt to redress the imbalance caused by the kind of toys that relatives and friends bought the children, rather than because they objected to the toys themselves.

'We haven't given her dolls, but that's because

she's got loads, from relatives mainly. You don't want to put down motherhood, saying its something not worth playing at, that to look after a child isn't just as valuable as driving a lorry or being a traindriver or whatever. Its just that she'd get so much pushed into that stereotyped way of playing anyway.'

(Mark Bates, daughter 5)

'She does play with dolls quite a lot. At the moment she's into bandaging up all her animals when they've had 'operations', and I don't mind that at all, its all part of the nurturing thing which I don't want her to lose. I don't want her to lose out on the so-called 'feminine' things.'

(Sheila Watson, daughter 9)

It was noticeable that few parents stressed the importance of 'so-called masculine things' for their sons, and yet maps, football posters, cars and trucks were much in evidence in practically all the rooms I saw belonging to boys (the girls' rooms were not particularly 'feminine'), and there was little evidence of much attempt to open up through toy provision the valuable 'feminine' traits to boys too. Several parents mentioned dolls, but usually to say that their son just 'wasn't interested' or had 'never asked' or had cuddly toys and action men but not a proper doll. There were parents of boys who did make positive efforts to provide their sons with 'feminine' toys; buying them a doll, encouraging them to use a jumble-sale cot for their soft toys, giving them a jewellery-making set (this last a present from Andrew Durrant for his son's seventh birthday). But on the

whole, parents of boys expressed less concern over the role of toys in perpetuating traditional stereotypes than did parents of girls.

6.2 Clothes

The same was true in the area of clothing. Most parents of girls spontaneously raised the issue of how far they wanted to encourage their daughters to wear trousers rather than dresses, whereas parents of boys rarely saw clothing as a relevant issue. The greater concern expressed by parents of girls was due to a combination of the practical advantages they perceived in boys' clothing (more hardwearing, allowing greater freedom of movement; etc.) and the role that they felt feminine clothes played in creating the passive, narcissistic elements of the traditional feminine stereotype.

"She's always going on about party dresses, once she even found a pair of very frilly knickers and brought them home! I asked her 'why do you want to wear a long party dress when it means you can't run around, why do you want to be frilly?' and she'll say 'its nice to be'. Its quite internalised, wanting to look pretty all the time."

(Mark Bates)

"I think it really does inhibit girls if they always wear skirts, I think it stops them climbing trees and playing about because other kids are going to see their knickers or something."

(Penny Griffiths, daughter 3)

"When she wanted a frilly dress, I said okay, but you must be aware that they'll take more care, you've got to be concerned about spilling things on them and you can't have such a good time."

(Sheila Watson, daughter 9)

For parents of boys, clothing was evidently far less of an issue. Partly this reflected the fact that in our society boys are allowed far less latitude in the kind of clothes they wear, and parents were aware of the difficulties likely to be encountered by a boy wearing a dress or a skirt. Few boys in the study had expressed a desire to wear dresses or skirts, but where they had, this created far more problems for parents than dressing their daughters in jeans and dungarees.

"At one stage Gary was very keen on wearing girls clothes; and it was difficult because although we were perfectly happy for him to wear skirts in the house, we felt if he wore one outside people would make such hurtful comments that it could undo all that we'd done. So as a compromise he had a kilt."
(Susan Durrant, daughter 8, son 7)

"When Josh was about three he decided one morning to wear a woman's smock that he loved to 'dress up' in. He put it on, but when his father realised he wanted to wear it to walk (with me) to the nursery he became furious and yelled that Josh was not to go out with a dress on. He refused to explain why he was so violently opposed to it."
(Jeanne Rosen, son 8)

"There was an article in the Guardian a couple of years ago, about somebody whose son wanted to wear a dress like his sister did to school. Now I think I'd say in that situation, if you want to dress up in it that's fine, but boys don't wear dresses really. I wouldn't allow him to wear a dress in public. Mostly because he'd be ridiculed and partly I suppose because it does seem a bit incongruous to me too, and I don't want him to . . . (pause). I think it's quite important to have some clear distinction between the sexes."
(Jill Harrison, son 4, daughter 1½)

Selma Greenberg's recommendations for non-sexist parents

on the topic of clothes are that they stress clothing as an aesthetic experience and give both sexes different kinds of clothes (flowing robes, tight swimming costumes, different colours and textures, etc.), which she suggests will help to develop a tactile awareness and an appreciation of beauty in both boys and girls. However, for the parents in this study, the issue of clothing in relation to non-sexist childrearing centred around the possibility of boys wearing dresses or skirts and the difficulties this would involve, and was generally seen to have little relevance to their attempts to counter traditional sex role stereotypes. Parents of girls saw clothing as more important and often discouraged particularly "feminine" or frilly articles, but none said they would prevent their daughters from wearing dresses at all.

6.3 Parents' Behaviour

The reinforcement that parents provide for different kinds of behaviour in girls and boys is a prominent feature of the social learning explanation of how children acquire sex roles, and figured in many parents' accounts of their non-traditional childrearing practice. However rather than seeing behaving towards children in a non-sexist way as treating boys and girls alike, many parents expressed a need to react differently to the same kind of behaviour in boys and girls, in an attempt

to counteract traditional sex-typing. They felt they would find it easier to let a son rather than a daughter cry after falling over or to let a daughter display her aggression, as a reaction to the over-protection of girls and the pressure on boys to keep a 'stiff upper lip'.

"I'd want to bring up a girl and boy to have similar strengths, in terms of being powerful and being sensitive, but in the situation of inequality we're in at the moment you're having to really push one side in boys, the side that's not getting encouraged elsewhere, and another side with girls."
(Sue Macmillan, son 1½)

"I do encourage them slightly more towards things which would be regarded as little boyish, simply because they're the things that will be squashed more by the rest of society, and the little girlish things will be encouraged anyway."
(John Noble, daughters 7 and 5)

Expectations about the kind of behaviour 'appropriate' for girls and boys were often quite deep-seated however, and could affect the parents' attitudes even when they consciously desired to reinforce non-traditional behaviour in their children. Sue Macmillan described how on a hot day when they were away from home, she bought one-year-old Sam a cotton dress in an Oxfam shop, to protect him from the sun. 'I wanted something light with long sleeves, and a dress seemed practical'. However, the knowledge that people would then view him as a girl influenced her own feelings about his noisy, boisterous behaviour.

"It really made me question how much I do relate

to him as a little boy. I think I would identify with him in different ways if he were a girl. It made me question some of his behaviour. He's a very loud baby, he rushes around shouting a lot and people react very positively usually, and I suddenly thought if they think he's a little girl will they be less affirming of that behaviour? I assume he'll get a very positive response from everyone we meet but pushing him along in his pushchair in this red and white spotted dress I felt people might think 'what's that little girl making all that awful noise for?'"

(Sue Macmillan)

Non-traditional reinforcement for girls involved allowing and encouraging them to be adventurous, independent and physically confident. (Many of the girls did judo, swimming or gymnastics.)

"She's always playing out in the street with her mates, she has a lot of freedom really."

(Liz Bates, daughter 5)

"It's very important that girls have physical confidence. It gives them a lot of self-confidence, helps them to stand up for themselves. Susan was very goody-goody when she came. She was weak, she always had headaches and played with dolls and wanted to be kissed. We made her climb trees and do things she didn't want to do. If she'd been really afraid or unable to do physical things we'd not have pushed it, but we felt it was important for her to try. Now she'll run and kick a football and join in games, and the boys respect her much more."

(Helen Powell, girls 8 and 12, boys 7 and 10, fostered for past year.)

For boys, non-traditional reinforcement involved encouraging them to be capable in terms of housework, and to be able to cry and express their feelings.

"Men are usually forced to shut down their emotions, not be in touch with them, the 'boys don't cry' bit."

That's one of the most important things I think we've done with Brian, encourage him to cry, to work out the problem at the time. We've had to tell other boy children its all right to cry too!" (Jeff Brierley, sons 5 and 1½)

"He spends a lot of time on my lap, and whenever he's unhappy, the first thing I say is 'Let's go to my room and have a cuddle and we'll talk about it'."

(Jeanne Rosen, son 8)

6.4 Books and Television

"I always look through books before I buy them for the children. There are three main categories of books I don't like, most of the Ladybird books (man of them are readers so they're sexist by definition), then the Boys Annuals and Girls Annuals, and books for boys, some of which are absolutely sadistic. Then there are comics. Most of the boys' comics are war comics, and the older girls' ones are all about how to catch a boy. I'd not like my children having things like that, just as I would try to stop them from watching certain kinds of television programmes. They know that there are certain limits."

(Susan Durrant, daughter 8, son 7)

Most parents believed that the stereotyped portrayal of men and women in children's books and on television did affect their children's ideas about sex roles, and they had tried in a variety of ways to counteract the traditional stereotypes presented in the media. Some parents looked for specifically anti-sexist books, although this often proved difficult.

"We got a list of non-sexist books, but they're not in the public library."

(Helen Powell)

"It's hard to find good non-sexist books, most of them are Scandinavian."
(Bob Perkins)

Other parents refused to read stories they particularly disliked. Some read the story anyway but commented on the stereotypes and encouraged the child to question them themselves. With younger children particularly, several parents described how they altered stories as they went along:

"Sometimes I used to miss out phrases that implied girls were stupid, and if there were adults in the story who were doing sex-stereotyped things, I'd often turn them around so the man was doing the washing up and the woman was doing something else."
(Susan Durrant, daughter 8, son 7)

"The Ladybird books are very sexist, its all firemen and policemen and so on, so I'll say 'look at that woman on a motorbike' or I'll use words like 'fireperson' . . . though soon she's going to realise they're not women."
(Tony O'Brien, daughter 2)

"I'll try to alter the characters, change some of the names so females have a more central role, like Jill and the Beanstalk, make it so it's not always the girl who's asking for help and advice. If there's a witch in it, I usually try and make the witch good rather than bad. Sometimes I actually go through the books and physically delete all sexist bits, because other people read her the stories too and it'd be confusing for her. And Alan makes up stories for her, he does fifty-fifty boys and girls which is good - I think it's really pernicious the way girls are always left out."
(Penny Griffiths, daughter 3)

"I've just told her I'm not going to read Snow White and the Seven Dwarves anymore because I don't like it, and I've made up a different version where everything happens differently. The old queen is just badly hurt that she's silly enough to think

that hating people is the sensible way to go about things, and Snow White is brilliant and brave as well as beautiful, and the seven dwarves have a rota for housework!"

(Kay Thompson, son $5\frac{1}{2}$, daughter $3\frac{1}{2}$)

Two distinct patterns emerged from a consideration of the parents' policy on books and television, which were consistent with their behaviour in the areas of clothing and toy provision. Just as girls were encouraged to play with tools and building sets and to wear jeans and trousers more than boys were encouraged to play with dolls and teasetts or to wear feminine clothing, so the parents' efforts in the area of books and television were mainly directed at correcting the stereotype of girls as weak, passive and domesticated, rather than with offering new models for boys' behaviour. This bias is reflected in the kind of non-sexist books available; there are an increasing number of stories with strong, independent girls as the main character, but far fewer showing boys in non-traditional roles. So for the boys their non-sexist upbringing involved learning that girls were a force to be reckoned with, who deserved treating with respect as equals, and that the preponderance of males in exciting roles and important positions in books and television programmes was both incorrect and unfair. Evidently the boys did not always find this easy to accept.

"Such a vast proportion of the characters in children's books are male, so sometimes I say to Bronwyn, well it could have been about a girl, shall we have it about a girl tonight? I've offered to do that for Gavin too, but he's not keen. In fact he was a bit upset when I went through a book which has a boy and girl in very traditional roles, and changed all the 'he's' to 'she's' and the 'she's' to 'he's'. When I first started doing that he was inclined to say 'you don't like boys, you only like girls'. I had to explain that that wasn't true at all, its just that there's not enough written about girls."

(Kay Thompson, son 5½, daughter 3½)

It was noticeable too that parents of girls were more likely to positively encourage non-traditional behaviour, whereas parents of boys were more likely to adopt a non-interventionist stance, both in terms of toy provision and in terms of raising awareness of sex role stereotyping. Allowing children to choose non-stereotyped behaviour rather than channelling them into it was an important feature of all the parents' accounts, as I shall suggest below, but parents of boys tended to leave it to their sons to initiate such behaviour whereas parents of girls were more likely to actively present them with non-traditional alternatives.

"So far there haven't been any circumstances where specific sex role things have come to light, and unless he has initiated anything like that we haven't actually started explaining roles."

(Jeff Brierley, sons 5 and 1½)

"If he wants a doll, sure he can have one. I've decided to concentrate on neutral toys, and to wait until he asks for any particular toys and just hope he selects a wide variety."

(Sarah Eichmann, son 6 months)

"I don't think its on to force boys to play with girls' toys. If he shows an inclination then I'd facilitate that as much as possible."
(Anna Brierley, sons 5 and 1½)

These differences in the meaning of non-sexist child-rearing for girls and boys are analysed further in chapter 11.3, in relation to the limits imposed on parents by bringing up their children within a male-dominated society. The second theme that characterised the parents' policy over books and television, as with toys and clothes, was their reluctance to use censorship to achieve their aim of minimising sex role stereotyping. Susan Durrant, quoted at the beginning of this section, was unusual in the extent to which she was prepared to enforce her disapproval of traditional sex role stereotypes, but she nevertheless agreed with the majority of parents in preferring to encourage a critical awareness of stereotyping rather than to prevent children from having access to sexist material altogether.

"The most important thing I think is to keep talking about it and to keep making comments, so that they are very aware themselves and in a position to see through the stereotyping."
(Susan Durrant, daughter 8, son 7)

"She's very into weddings and pretty dresses and fairy tales. All I can do is to plod out the alternatives. I can't say 'no, that's wrong', or 'women don't do things like that'. I don't see it as forbidding things, just trying to put an alternative point of view all the time."
(Rosemary Simpson, daughter 6)

"We don't take them (very feminine dolls) off her and dump them or anything like that, we let her play with them, though we do try to minimise the impact by the names we give them . . . the most feminine doll she's got, rapidly lost all her clothes and apart from long hair became an indeterminate sex, so she's just called 'friend' now."

(Alan Patterson, daughter 3)

"I do things like sitting watching television and pointing out the sexist bits. I watch Top of the Pops with him and make comments about why the women should be all dressed up like that."

(Jeanne Rosen, son 8)

"I'm convinced its a continual positive reassertion, rather than a question of stopping them doing things, or controlling them."

(Bob Perkins, twin daughters 3½)

6.5 Inadequacy of reinforcement explanations

In a simple reinforcement model of sex role learning, such concerns about the undesirability of censorship or the importance of fostering a critical awareness of sex role stereotyping have little place. The child is seen as a passive recipient, learning the 'appropriate' role through rewards and punishments. The behaviourist tradition on which social learning theory is based does not take into account such unquantifiable concepts as motivation or the meaning of non-traditional sex role behaviour for the child. The parents participating in this research, however, clearly did take account of such factors. They saw the child as playing an active part in sex role learning. The connection between toys and the kind of behaviour they elicited in children was perceived to be far more complex

than a simple imposition model of learning would predict. The way children used a particular toy, the encouragement they were given to play with it, and the context in which it was provided, also affected the toy's significance in terms of sex role learning. The household equipment given to a girl in a shared house where the four adults had a rota for housework, for instance, was less likely to give her the idea that housework was something only women did.

"Before I had a child I'd always considered I'd never give her toy household things, making her think that housework is fun when its not. But now I'm not so sure, I see it more as a developmental thing, learning to imitate adults. And its not just the women that she sees doing housework, we have a rota so she's just as likely to see Tony using the Hoover as me."
(Janet O'Brien, daughter 2)

The relationship between giving a child a doll and thus providing an opportunity for being nurturing and caring also proved more complex. Some children used teddies or 'cuddlies' in the same way that others might use a doll.

"They put nappies on them and play school and they frequently give birth to them from under their jumpers, but they've never really shown any interest in dolls."
(Jenny Chadwick, twin daughters aged 3½)

Other children had soft toys but used them in a different way.

"He's very attached to his teddy bears, yet he hasn't played with them in the way some girls play with their dolls, they're companions to

him really."

(Mary Lewis; son 11, daughter 7)

With 'Action Man' type dolls, many parents pointed out that giving them to boys wasn't a real substitute for providing a doll, since 'you can't change his nappy and you put him in a tank rather than a cot', although Mary Lewis suggested that such action figures could be played with differently, as her daughter did:

"Action men are people to her, she has conversations with them, they're not men of war."

The personalities and preconceptions of the children were thus seen to interact with the toys they were given, and determine to some extent how they were played with.

Parents also acknowledged the child's active role in sex role learning in their recognition of the extent to which children themselves desired to behave in traditionally sex-typed ways. One of the strengths of the social learning theory is that it draws attention to the narrow and stereotypical nature of traditional roles for men and women in our society; one of its weaknesses is its inability to explain why these roles are so strongly adhered to. Reinforcement associations are insufficient to account for the strength and tenacity of sex roles, and for the emotional and motivational aspects as well as for externally observable behaviour.

"Social learning theory's principal weakness is that it tends to assure a pre-given content that is

mechanically transmitted from one generation to the next . . . to see socialisation in this way is to consider every individual the passive victim of a monolithically imposed system. It prevents understanding of the positive acceptance of such identities."

(Barrett and McIntosh 1982)

The parents I interviewed did not think of non-sexist childrearing as the 'mechanical transmission' of non-traditional behaviour and attitudes, but as something in which their children were active participants. The implications of the social learning theory would be that the more consistent and thorough the parents' reinforcement of non-traditional behaviour, the greater their effectiveness in fostering non-stereotyped behaviour. In practice, however, parents often expressed a reluctance to push their views too strongly in case the child reacted against them.

"I think to restrain too much is to create a vacuum of desire which is not filled."

(Jeanne Rosen, son 8)

"I'd show my distaste, say I didn't like it and then ignore any behaviour rather than forbid it. I think any big response makes them keen, whereas if you just ignore it or show a general distaste but not any great involvement, they might drop it."

(Sue Macmillan, son 1½)

"I think if you're too uptight about it, you can predispose them to rebel in the opposite direction. If I said to Vicky 'no, you can't have that dress, it's so sissy and stupid and it'll get so dirty' - you can do that up to a point, but if you really said 'a boiler suit for you, mate' all the way through, you'd develop a child who'd immediately go out and spend her teenage pocket money on pink flowery dresses, wouldn't you?"

(Jill Harrison, son 4, daughter 1½)

The parents accepted that children had needs and fantasies of their own which rendered inadequate any theory that represents parents as simply moulding their children's behaviour. In their discussion of the use of specifically anti-sexist children's books, for instance, it was clear that their general lack of enthusiasm was due to a feeling that these were limited in their usefulness because they failed to engage with the issues that were important to children. Bruno Bettelheim's psychoanalysis of fairy tales (Bettelheim 1976) suggests that their attraction lies in the allegories they present about parental separation, sibling rivalry, sexuality and curiosity; and hence implies that books with a strong anti-sexist message but little significance for the child's emotional life will have little effect in terms of fostering non-traditional behaviour. Parents in this study appeared to think likewise.

"It's difficult to find really good stuff. The Anthea series of books are always good, they deal with the sort of real problems that kids face, and the Thomas and Emma ones we'd recommend unreservedly. But it's difficult to find good stuff . . . there have been some attempts at non-sexist books, but they seem worthy rather than entertaining."
(Bob Perkins, twin daughters aged 6)

Similarly Kay Thompson, having described how she altered some of the traditional stereotypes in the fairy tale 'Snow White' when reading it to her 3½-year-old daughter (see 6.4), added ruefully that 'she still has a fascination

for the other version, though!'

6.6 Summary

In their conception of non-sexist childrearing it was clear that these parents had moved beyond a simple reinforcement model of sex role learning. The behaviourist principles of social learning theory were incompatible both with their perception of children as active participants in the process of sex role learning, and also with an essential ingredient in their non-sexist child-rearing policy, which was to positively encourage children to be critical and questioning. They appeared more concerned with encouraging the kind of personality characteristics that would enable the child to behave in non-conventional ways, than with shaping the child's behaviour in a particular direction. They talked about non-sexist childrearing in terms of developing the child's self-confidence and belief in themselves.

"I'd like to see them become people who can deal in a competent way with any difficulties they come across. I'd like them to take the view that they can solve things if they get difficult, to feel they have some power over their circumstances and their life."
(Kay Thompson, son 5½, daughter 3½)

"It involves trying to instill in them both a sense of self-confidence, a sense of their own ability. Teaching them to be assertive and to know what they want, to be able to make decisions - and at the same time teaching them to be sensitive and aware of other people's needs."
(Mary Lewis, son 11, daughter 7)

"Its a question of the child having confidence in themselves to do something that's not quite conventional."

(Lynn Eldridge, son 6, daughter 4)

Since the majority of parents rejected a straightforward link between the kind of behaviour the child engaged in and the development of a particular kind of personality, they were led to emphasise other factors in their perception of what a non-sexist upbringing should involve. Two such factors characterised their accounts. The first was the parents' concern with the way cognitive processes in the child interacted with their attempts to raise the child in a non-sexist way, and this theme is taken up in the next chapter. The second was the parents' stress on the importance of the kind of relationship they developed with the child, which is explored further in chapter eight.

CHAPTER SEVENCognitive Processes in sex role learning7.1 Child as active participant

Although the conception of non-sexist childrearing held by the parents in this study did not include the deterministic notion of moulding the behaviour of children, neither could they be described by the caricature of liberal parents who believe that children's personalities and attitudes should be allowed to unfold naturally with as little interference as possible from adults. The parents accepted the proposition that 'masculine' and 'feminine' are socially constructed categories and that change demands conscious intervention in the socialisation process. However rather than attempting to control the child's environment in terms of toys, books, clothing, etc., the role that they saw for themselves in that process was to make children aware and critical of sex role stereotyping. Discussing sex role issues was the means by which they hoped to raise children's consciousness and was also seen as a way of reconciling the possibly conflicting demands of liberalism and non-sexism. Being explicit about the values that they held was not seen to contradict their desire to grant their children autonomy and independence.

"It does bother me that I set up situations for them that might be difficult for them to cope

with, and it bothers me that they might feel on the margin of things because of this. I try and be quite sensitive to that, and I might water down what I think because I don't want them to feel alienated from the people that they relate to. But it doesn't bother me that I am giving them a fairly strong framework of values in which to operate, because its one I believe in strongly. Its one of the things I'm trying to teach them, fundamental things about how you perceive and relate to other people, respecting them and allowing them to do what they want to do, not putting up barriers like what sex they are or what colour they are. It covers lots of other issues besides the sexist ones. So that side of it doesn't bother me at all."
 (Mary Lewis, son 11, daughter 7)

"To me the key is discussion, explaining things, not imposing things as final values but simply behaving the way that you think is right for yourself, and explaining why. Wherever possible you give real reasons when you're training children to do things, you don't just say you've got to do it because I say so. It seems to me that's the difference between an old-fashioned upbringing which was based solely on authority, and ideas where its rationality that's the crucial thing, and explaining and understanding are much more important than obeying."
 (Jane Mitchell, daughter 2 and three teenage children)

Terms like 'explaining' and 'understanding' indicate that for these parents, the child's co-operation and participation formed an essential part of the concept of non-sexist childrearing. They saw their task as providing a strong framework of values and as much information as possible, but then allowing them to make up their own minds. They talked of aiming to

"give her the groundwork and then leave her to make her own decisions."

(Sheila Watson, daughter 9)

of trying to

"put our views across to them and just hope that they will take the best of them, really."

(Jenny Chadwick, twin daughters 6)

of

"showing them something different, and then its up to them - you can't do more than give them an alternative."

(Helen Powell, four children 7-12 fostered for the past year)

In trying to increase the child's awareness and understanding of sex role issues and encouraging them to choose less stereotyped options for themselves, the parents were rejecting the implications of social learning theories which view the child as a passive learner of sex roles and place the emphasis on providing an environment as free as possible of sex role stereotyping. In contrast, many parents pointed out that they were not trying to shield their children from sexism, so much as trying to make them aware and critical of it.

"My mother was a feminist of the old school, and I don't remember being aware that men were treated differently from women. I think she tried to pretend sexism didn't exist. That was better than leaving me in it, but I'd rather explain to my children that most people think that you can't do all sorts of things because you're a woman, or because you're a man, and I just happen to think that's completely wrong."

(Kay Thompson, son 5½ daughter 3½)

"I'd explicitly try to point out sexist things, but I wouldn't try to cut him off from sexism in society, because I don't think you can. I'd point things out as they come up."

(Sarah Eichmann, son 6 months)

"I feel that rather than censor her reading I'd rather she read everything and learnt to read it critically. She got 'The Teenager's Guide to Sex' out of the library recently, and I explained that not everybody feels this way about these questions and you may consider another way of looking at it."

(Sheila Watson, daughter 9)

"By pointing out sexism, you can make them aware and begin to question it themselves. I think its that questioning which is probably the most important, to make them aware so that they begin to question sexist assumptions as they come up in other contexts."

(Jenny Chadwick, twin daughters 6)

The parents' emphasis on concepts like 'questioning', 'understanding' and 'explaining' reflects the cognitive developmental theory's stress on the cognitive processes within the child which interact with factors in his or her environment. In Piagetian terminology:

"If we persist in giving children information which will force them to question their use of gender as a classificatory clue, then accommodation might eventually take place . . . Perhaps a key variable in determining whether children's stereotypic categories will change with age is their exposure to information that is discrepant with their categorical system."

(Frieze et al 1978, 122)

7.2 Stages of Development

Cognitive developmental theory also assumes a sequence of fixed developmental stages through which children must pass

in a particular order until their ideas about gender approximate those of adults. It implies that after an original undifferentiated state when they are unaware of gender, children will inevitably go through a sex-typed stage regardless of what their parents and teachers say and do. The theory would suggest this is so partly because their cognitive level leads them to see things in terms of either -or dichotomies, and partly because they have not yet grasped the notion of gender constancy (that they will stay male or female) and hence feel that they need to do all the things that boys do or that girls do in order to remain a boy or a girl. It follows that a possible strategy for reducing sex role stereotyping would be to discuss sex roles with young children and help them to understand that their sex is based on genital differences rather than on appearance or behaviour. As Money and Tucker put it,

"those whose gender schemas are firmly based on the genital differences and reproductive functions can afford to keep the rest of their schemas flexible."

(Money and Tucker 1975, 148)

Some support for this suggestion is provided by the experiences of an American preschool teacher who produced a book containing photographs of children of both sexes showing that they could share the same names, emotions and activities with the permanent difference being a

genital one. She commented in the introduction:

"I wrote this book to end the battle between the sexes in my classroom. It worked. When the children got the information they needed they didn't have to exclude and stereotype each other to form a secure sexual identity. They felt good about their bodies and about being girls or boys."

(Waxman, 1976)

A more academic piece of research by Maureen McConaghy into the determinants of sex role learning in a sample of over two hundred young Swedish children, also implies that once children realise the role of genital differences in categorising into male and female, they are less likely to adhere to rigid sex role stereotypes. In her research, she discovered that children from egalitarian homes were often more stereotyped than those whose parents exhibited sex-differentiated behaviour. She suggests this is because children at this cognitive level need to be able to categorise into male and female, and that when there are few sex role norms for them to latch on to, they adhere more rigidly to those few that they can find. She feels that the solution is to bring children to an early awareness that sex is based on genital differences, rather than role behaviour.

"Children from more egalitarian homes, despite having less extensive sex-role norms, were more rigid in conforming to those norms. If cognitive theory is correct in assuming gender to be important to young children and to be understood by them as determined by sex role behaviour, then discouragement

of sex-role learning unaccompanied by clarification of the nature of gender may result in rigid conformity to sex-role norms and may even arouse anxiety in the child over gender identity."
(McConaghy, 1978, 29)

In practice this 'clarification of the nature of gender' is not always as easy as it sounds. One parent in my study, well-versed in the theories of sex role learning, described the difficulties of trying to get her two-year-old daughter to understand that males and females are categorised on the basis of their genitals.

"When we were on holiday abroad last week, two of the words that she learned were 'man' and 'woman', and she started trying to attach these to people. Theoretically I think the thing to do is to tell her men have got penises and women have got vaginas, but when she's going around in the street and saying 'man' or 'woman' and getting it wrong, you can't say 'no, that one's got a penis and that one hasn't' - I just can't do that, even in a foreign country where they wouldn't understand! And apart from that, it doesn't help her categorising. You do have to learn to categorise on external features - I suppose it must be faces, or body structure that we use."

(Janet O'Brien, daughter just 2)

Another parent described using Waxman's book (mentioned above) as the basis for discussing the nature of sex roles with her small daughter.

"She went through a phase when she was about 2½ of having a theory that boys had round heads and girls had long hair. I talk with her a lot about sex roles, and I've read her a very good book called 'What is a Girl? What is a Boy?' and each time she gets different things out of it

she's quite clear now that its penis and vagina that differentiate boys and girls."
(Penny Griffiths, daughter 3)

Other parents tried to clarify for their children which were the real differences between boys and girls and which were arbitrary ones resulting from social conventions or the child's misconceptions.

"Gavin got quite upset when we explained he couldn't grow a baby in his tummy like Bronwyn, so we told him he could take care of a baby instead."
(Kay Thompson, son 5½, daughter 3½)

Children were often described by their parents as going through a 'stage' or 'phase' where they categorised behaviour rigidly into male or female, often contrary to the evidence. In line with their emphasis on the child's reasoning and understanding, most parents countered this not simply by contradicting what their children said, but by giving them examples where their generalisation did not hold true. They wanted children to see for themselves that their rigid categorisation needed to be modified.

"She comes out with some very strange things, like we saw a woman fishing down the river the other day and she said 'women don't fish'. Yet at the same time she's wanting a fishing rod! So I point out the contradiction."
(Rosemary Simpson, daughter 6)

"They told me doctors are men and women are nurses - even though two of our friends are male nurses - psychiatric ones, but they're still nurses - and they've seen female doctors.

It goes against the grain, why should they pick that one up so dogmatically? We just say, 'is so and so a man or a woman?', things like that."

(Jenny Chadwick, twin daughters 3½)

"Sometimes they come out with these incredible generalisations, girls think this or boys do that, and I find then its useful having a child of each sex because I can bring it down to a very basic level, like 'what would Karen feel about it?' or 'but Gary does that'. It helps if they can think of somebody they know where its not true."

(Susan Durrant, daughter 8, son 7)

Sometimes this categorisation was the opposite of traditional sex stereotyping, for instance that girls shouldn't wear dresses or that only women can drive, but what parents were concerned to do was to help their children move beyond this kind of over-generalisation to develop a more flexible attitude towards sex roles.

"They think its odd to see a man driving a car, because I drive. So they'll say 'Oh, there's a man driving a car!' We say 'yes, anybody can drive a car, it's just that I do and Bob doesn't'."

(Jenny Chadwick, twin daughters 3½)

"She's been through a number of stages. When she was quite small, between about 2 and 4, she became acutely aware that boys were more advantaged, and she said she was a boy and wanted to be a boy. Then she seemed to change around completely and said she was a girl and she wanted to grow her hair long and wear dresses and she wanted people to say she looked pretty. This lasted until relatively recently, and now she's into Edit Blyton's Famous Five and identifies very much with George, the tomboy, and has formed a Nature Club with one of the rules that you can't come in dresses! The problem now is, I'm trying to get across to her the slightly more sophisticated concept that not being frilly doesn't mean you

can't wear a dress, and it doesn't mean you've got to deny that you're a girl. You can be a girl and still do all these things. But in a sense she's still stuck, and I think its the situation society imposes on her, that either she's got to be a tomboy, quasi-boy, or she's got to be a girl in the stereotyped role, and there isn't any sort of model for her to fit in with between. She can't be an active girl."
(Susan Durrant, daughter 8, son 7)

The parents' stress as the child's active role in sex role learning was also evident in their wish for children to be able to think through sex role issues themselves, rather than simply be able to reproduce their parents' ideas.

Primary school aged children were perceived as being well aware of their parents' views on the subject of sex roles.

The children would report things that happened at school with 'you won't like this but . . .', or preface a request to watch a particular television programme with 'I know you think its silly, but . . .'.

"He told me once 'I've met this boy - and he isn't very rough', because he knew I didn't like people who played and acted rough."
(Jeanne Rosen, son 8)

However being aware of their parents' views was seen as one thing, being able to argue for them themselves as another. The goal most parents seemed to be aiming for was that their children be in a position to take a stand on the issues for themselves. As the cognitive developmental theorists would put it, they wanted them to assimilate these non-stereotyped perceptions into their

own categorical system. They were aware of the limits placed on what they could achieve by the child's level of cognitive maturity, and tried to give children explanations which they felt they would be able to understand.

"We don't say 'we don't think you should wear a dress today because its making you too feminine', we say 'we don't think you should wear a dress today because you're going to be active and its cold and you'll need something warm on your legs. We'd discuss it in those terms.'
(Alan Patterson, daughter 3)

They were concerned not to put children in a position - especially at school - of having to defend views they did not really understand.

"You can teach them anything when they're young. Lucy started calling the police 'The Filth' and though its fun, I know I must stop doing it. You've got to deal with concepts they can handle. If they don't understand what you're talking about and they just receive counter-information from you, you put them in an impossible position. I think you've got to take it quite carefully, give them as much information as they can handle but not expect them to go on the attack, and just defend them in the first few years until they can argue for themselves what you're telling them."
(Bob Perkins, twin daughters 3½)

Bob was critical of a friend who had given his nine-year-old daughter an anti-establishment view of Churchill which the child repeated in a history lesson, because he felt that had the teacher attacked her view the child would have been unable to defend it. His twelve-year-old nephew, on the other hand, was well able to argue his position when he refused to see the Queen at Jubilee

time, and Bob felt that it was this level of awareness and confidence that they would be aiming for on non-sexist issues too.

The importance of this critical awareness of sex role stereotyping was stressed particularly by parents of older children, and had become a much more prominent feature in the follow-up interviews with two families where the children were approaching adolescence.

"She's now eleven and is very much aware of these things herself. She will point out stereotypes on the telly and in books and in people talking - she'll nudge me when someone says something sexist. That's happened in the last year or so really."
(Sheila Watson, daughter 11)

"He's recently begun to ask questions like 'is this sexist?' and to criticise sexist ads on television himself."
(Jeanne Rosen, son 10)

"He's very conscious of things. We went to a meeting about his school trip and the teacher described how the two women teachers would be responsible for all the cooking. We were sitting in different places and he turned around and grinned at me, as if to say 'what do you think of that?' He'll point out a situation where the woman's doing everything and say 'that's not fair, is it?'"
(Mary Lewis, son 11, daughter 7)

Thus it was evident that the parents took into account the child's age and cognitive maturity when deciding how best to counter traditional sex role stereotyping, and that they saw the child as playing an active part in constructing her or his own gender identity. In the

next chapter I shall deal with a second way in which a purely behaviourist account proved inadequate to describe how the parents thought of a non-sexist upbringing, by analysing the significance they attached to breaking down traditional sex roles in their own lives through sharing housework, childcare and paid employment.

CHAPTER EIGHT

IMITATION AND IDENTIFICATION

"A child whose father performs the mothering functions both tangibly and emotionally while the mother is preoccupied with her career can easily gain a distorted image of masculinity and femininity."

(Bell and Vogel 1968: S86)

8.0 Introduction

All three theories stress the importance of parents themselves engaging in non-traditional sex role behaviour in order to influence their children's development in this area. Social learning theory emphasises the role of parents as models, and the implication for non-sexist childrearing would be that children need to see men doing housework, looking after children and showing their emotions, and to see women using tools, being strong and competent and working outside the home, in order to broaden their perceptions of what is appropriate behaviour for men and women. If non-sexist childrearing is seen as encouraging children to feel able to engage in a full range of human activities rather than as reversing traditional sex role stereotypes, then social learning theory would imply that these non-traditional options would need to be presented to children in addition to the more usual ones, rather than instead of them, but since society as a whole more than adequately presents children with traditional

models and expectations, the main role of non-sexist parents would be to demonstrate the alternatives.

Feminist psychoanalytic theorists also stress the importance of men doing childcare and women paid work, but for different reasons. Rather than providing non-traditional models for children to imitate, shared parenting is seen as necessary in order to alter fundamental personality characteristics at the heart of 'masculinity' and 'femininity'.

"Any strategy for change whose goal includes a liberation from the constraints of an unequal social organisation of gender must take account of the need for a fundamental reorganisation of parenting so that primary parenting is shared between men and women."

(Chodorow 1978, 215)

Chodorow argues that men must become emotionally involved in the care of small children in order to alter the pattern of boys developing a sense of themselves as reserved, enclosed and separate from the world, and that women need to have access to power and a source of esteem in the public world in order not to continue a process whereby girls have difficulty in sufficiently differentiating themselves from their mothers and in experiencing themselves as separate individuals. In an earlier paper Chodorow notes that in some 'primitive' societies where women are strong, important people with other interests besides their children, mothers did not produce dependent, passive, 'feminine' daughters.

"A mother is not invested in keeping her daughter from individuating and becoming less dependent . . . a daughter's identification with her mother in this kind of setting is with a strong woman with clear control over important spheres of life, whose sense of self-esteem can reflect this."
(Chodorow, 1974, 63)

Thus feminist psychoanalytic theorists would argue that to allow children of both sexes to develop a positive, secure gender identity and a strong, separate sense of self would require men to take a major role in childcare (to avoid the boy's rejection of connectedness, defined by Chodorow as a sense of continuity with others), and for women to have a valued role and control in society.

The cognitive developmental theorists probably place the least emphasis on the necessity of parents behaving in non-traditional ways themselves, since they stress the child's role in creating his or her own gender identity, but they do see 'exposure to egalitarian models and information' as an important part of any attempt to change traditional sex role stereotypes.

"A cognitive developmental approach would lead to the conclusion that gender will emerge as an early classificatory clue, that it will form the basis for stable and persistent stereotypes throughout the preschool and elementary school years, and that change in these stereotypes will depend both on exposure of the child to egalitarian models and information, and on the child's cognitive maturity."
(Frieze et al, 1978, 123)

8.1 Modelling: housework, paid work, childcare

The modelling aspect of sex role learning figured strongly in most parents' accounts of non-sexist childrearing.

"I don't see how you could possibly do it without trying to live it as well. Because you know, if for instance Jenny stayed at home all the time and just looked after the house and fetched them from school and so on, it would be very difficult to say to them, well look, you can be a doctor, you can do this and that and the other. You have to try to show them in practice, how you form more equal relationships and so on."
(Bob Perkins)

The parents felt that it was important that children see them behave in non-traditional ways and had attempted in varying degrees to break down the division of labour whereby women are responsible for housework and childcare while men go out to work and support the family financially. One family in the study had reversed roles completely. Derek Powell had given up his job as an export salesman a year previously to look after the four children aged seven to twelve whom he and Helen had decided to foster, while Helen continued in her demanding job as an industrial editor. They felt that only by reversing roles in this way could they really provide the children with an example of non-stereotyped behaviour.

"We think the greatest thing we've done is to actually live out our beliefs, let them see that a man can be fully valuable as a non-wage earner."
(Derek Powell)

"We've been accused of being a joke, reversing roles for the hell of it. All we're doing is

that I'm doing what he'd normally be doing and he's doing what I'd be doing - big deal. But to us its very important, at a much deeper level. Nobody else I know in the Women's Movement has gone this far and put into practice what they preach. You can believe in it till the cows come home, but you have to prove it. We made a conscious decision to do this to put right some of the wrongs in society, to bring up some children who will see that there is an alternative."

(Helen Powell)

Helen and Derek Powell were the only ones who had reversed roles in this traditional sense, so that Derek was responsible for getting the children up and off to school, doing the cooking, washing, shopping and cleaning, etc., while Helen 'helped out' in the evenings and at weekends. In another family, John Noble described himself as the 'houseperson' and said he enjoyed what he called 'the nest building side of it', but he acknowledged that he had an alternative identity as a medical student. Because he was at home much of the time while Patricia was at work, he did most of the housework and also dealt with many day-time aspects of childcare; taking his two daughters to school, writing notes to their teachers, attending their medicals, helping out at school swimming lessons, making arrangements with friends to pick the children up from school when he couldn't make it and looking after their children in return. However John felt that he was not 'just a housewife'; housework was

something he was doing for this period in his life.

Rather than reversing roles, the majority of families in the study had tried to model non-traditional sex roles by sharing both 'masculine' and 'feminine' tasks, consistent with their aims of 'opening up options' and with their policy of providing toys etc. for both sexes. They attempted to break down in their own lives the traditional division of labour into 'men's work' (paid employment, car maintenance, DIY jobs, major decision making) and 'women's work' (childcare, housework, and perhaps a parttime, less important job to make ends meet).

"One of the most important things we've tried to do is to both do everything that's needed in the house, and to both look after them equally - and not just in terms of, you know, Bob will occasionally do everything. We actually work like a team. We don't have his jobs and my jobs, we just muck in and do whatever's needed.
(Jenny Chadwick)

"What he sees here is men and women doing the domestic side of things, taking him to town, washing nappies, minding him."
(Sue MacMillan)

"I emphasise that I meand bicycle punctures and sash windows and that women can do all these things even though they often choose not to."
(Sheila Watson)

Jobs like washing, cooking and cleaning were often done on a rota basis, particularly where there were several adults involved. The O'Briens and the Griffiths, who shared their houses with other families, operated rota

systems for these tasks. Ian Robinson, Jane Mitchell and her three teenage children shared the domestic work between them "for democratic as well as sex-role reasons". The eight adults in the community where Sue MacMillan lived did two days a week each of childcare, paid employment and "support" work, (cooking and cleaning). In other families specific jobs were traded off to reach what was considered to be a fair division of labour.

"I do the oven, Jeanne has the fridges. Kitchen floor and washing-up is alternated. Cooking is alternated except on Sunday when we cook a casserole which is supposed to last for four days, which we do together. I clean the stairs and living room, Jeanne does the bathroom, Josh does the hall. I do the Sainsbury's shopping, she does the vegetable shopping."
(Mike Underwood)

Key and Owen Thompson, who both held part-time jobs, had evolved a system where each was totally responsible for childcare and housework when the other was at work.

"Mostly it works out that we have one of us responsible at home, and one out at work. The children have ten minutes of 'special time' each night, one with each of us, and it alternates every night. Apart from that we work roughly on the principle that whoever's been at home cooks the supper, and whoever's been at work puts the children to bed and tells them a story. At weekends one of us is the houseperson and the other one is 'off' and we negotiate swaps."
(Kay Thompson)

The exceptions to this sharing of housework were those families where one parent stayed at home fulltime to care for the children, and consequently ended up doing

the bulk of the domestic chores too. Lynn Eldridge and Anna Brierley had both chosen, in so far as it was a free choice, to stay at home with their children, and both cited this as a reason for their doing a much larger share of housework.

(Shopping) "I tend to do that. Jeff would do it if I asked him but he'd want a list."

(Buying children's clothes) "I buy them, because I'm more aware of what they have and what they need because I'm with them all day."

(Washing) "He'll sometimes do a load of nappies, and if I say 'this needs doing' he'll do it, but otherwise I do it."

(Buying presents) "I remember to buy cards and things like presents for Brian's friend's parties. Again, Jeff will go and get something if I can say the sort of thing that's wanted."

(Looking after the children when they're ill) "It never occurs to us that Jeff should stay at home and look after them, because I'm not in a paid job."

(Anna Brierley)

She sees this as justified: "As I chose, to some extent, to be at home, it's more rational for me to get on and do a lot of the housework, even if I don't like it - Jeff doesn't like a lot of aspects of his job either - because then that frees other time for us to do things we want to do, together or as a family or for ourselves."

Similarly Lynn Eldridge felt she ought to do more of the housework than Mick because she was at home:

"I don't feel any grievance about having to do most of the cooking and washing and washing up, because Mick's out at work all day so it seems fair enough that I do it."

One parent being in paid employment while the other stayed at home thus had a noticeable effect on the extent to which household and childcare tasks were shared.

"When we were both working, we both did the housework, though we never had any formal allocation of tasks. Its having the kids that's made the difference, and Anna being at home."

(Jeff Brierley)

In most of the families, children saw both their parents go out to work or to study.

"They think that everybody goes somewhere every day, that you either go to work or school or college or a childminder or a nursery school or something - everybody in a family goes out of the house every morning."

(Jenny Chadwick)

There were three mothers in the study who did not have paid employment outside the home. Lynn Eldridge and Anna Brierley, as described above, cared for their children full-time at home while their husbands went out to work. Rosemary Simpson was a single parent who had not been able to find a job which she could combine with looking after six-year-old Eve, although she was actively looking for one. All of the other women worked outside the home, many as academics, students or free-lance writers. They were more likely than the men to be students or to have flexible jobs which could be combined with childcare, an imbalance which I shall discuss further in chapter ten. Only one of the men,

Derek Powell, was fulltime at home looking after his and Helen's four fostered children, although John Noble saw himself as being the major 'houseperson', as well as being a medical student. Kay and Owen Thompson had both worked part-time for the past six years and each looked after the children on the days they were at home. Kay worked two full days and two half days per week as a nuclear physicist at a nearby laboratory, Owen taught five half-days at a local school. They dovetailed their working hours to minimise the need for external caretakers, and by each being responsible in turn for domestic and wage-earning work they managed to fairly equally share these tasks. Sue MacMillan also worked part-time. The group of people she lived with believed that housework and childcare should be allocated the same status as paid employment (the community ran a building co-operative and shared their income), and it was expected that everyone do two days work per week in each area. Sue's fifteen-month-old son Sam was thus cared for during the day by adults of both sexes who were concerned about minimising sex role stereotyping and he saw both men and women doing household chores. However the bulk of his care outside of the group's creche hours fell on Sue, since it was her decision to have a child. In common with an increasing number of feminist women in their

twenties and early thirties, she was caught in the dilemma of considering single parenting as a positive choice, and yet feeling it was important that men be equally involved in childcare in order to counteract traditional sex-role stereotypes.

In terms of paid employment then, the children in most of these families saw both men and women as having a role outside the home, although there were obvious differences in the nature of that role and its relationship to men's and women's childrearing responsibilities.

In terms of sharing childcare, the majority of fathers in the study participated far more than the 'average' father reported in much of the literature (see chapter one). They got children up, tidied their toys, changed nappies, took them to nursery or school, read and played with them, washed and put them to bed. Spending time with some of the families before or after interviews, I often noticed children going to their fathers to be comforted, for help with putting on an awkward nightdress, or with a request for something to eat. There were important limits to the extent to which most fathers participated in childcare, which I shall analyse in greater depth in section one of chapter eleven; however, the principle of sharing housework, childcare and paid employment formed an important part of most parent's conception of non-sexist childrearing.

8.2 Relationships and roles

Although they emphasised the importance of trying to break down the traditional stereotypes of male breadwinner and female childcarer/houseworker, it appeared that the parents did not see themselves as simply providing models of non-traditional behaviour in order that children could imitate these models and thus learn less stereotyped sex roles. In the same way that they rejected the behaviourist notion of moulding children into non-traditional sex roles through altering reinforcement contingencies, so most parents rejected the behaviourism implicit in the idea of children passively imitating non-stereotyped role models. The motivational and emotional elements which are absent from social learning theory were evident in the parents' descriptions of why they thought it important to behave in non-sex-stereotyped ways themselves.

They were concerned with the significance and meaning of the way in which they divided their labour, and the effects of this on relationships between themselves and between themselves and their children. Anna Brierley, for instance, saw herself and Jeff as bringing up their two young sons in a non-sexist way despite the fact that she did most of the housework and childcare while Jeff

worked fulltime outside the home, since she felt that what mattered was not so much the roles she and Jeff performed, as the way they related to each other and to their children.

"I'm not sure to what extent the fact that I don't go out to work is going to affect them. I think it's more the way the parents relate, their attitude to one another and what they do when they're together. A lot of it, particularly for boy children, must be the way the father models what being a man is, and if they have the model of a father who respects women as people and shares everything out, then even if he goes out to work and the woman stays at home, that must help a great deal in forming their attitudes."
(Anna Brierley)

Penny Griffiths expressed a similar feeling, although she herself was in fulltime paid employment.

"I don't know that going out to work is the most important thing. It would depend on how you valued yourself and what you thought of what you did. If you thought that what your husband did was more important than what you did all the time, then I think that would convey itself to the child, but I don't think it necessarily matters if the woman stays at home . . . it depends on the people."
(Penny Griffiths)

Other parents shared this concern with the importance of the relationship between them, but felt however that this relationship could not be separated from the way in which they divided their labour.

"We found in the short period when we did have traditional roles, that we fitted into them. Bob started feeling things like 'you're spending all my money' and I'd say 'I need some money to buy the children shoes', and he'd come in and say

'what have you been doing all day?' . . .
 not all of the time, just when you were feeling
 tired and dispirited, these things would come up,
 and we felt it was doing us a lot of damage and
 it was bound to have been noticed by the children
 if it had persisted."

(Jenny Chadwick)

It was the effects of their division of labour on their interaction with each other and with their children that concerned the parents, rather than their role as models of non-traditional behaviour. Sharing childcare and paid employment provided a framework for different kinds of relationships; a more equal relationship between parents, a closer relationship between fathers and children, and a less intense relationship between mothers and children. It established an emotional climate within the family of attempts to equalise power and to open up options, rather than simply providing children with non-sexist models of behaviour which they could passively imitate. Parents rejected this view of children as passive learners and saw them instead as playing an active role, interpreting and making sense of their parents' behaviour; needing to be persuaded and convinced to want to behave in non sex-stereotyped ways. Talking about the need for sex role change without also trying to put those ideas into practice would be

"like saying you're a socialist and then living a clearly exploitative life. It seems to me you can't convince only by theory, it has to be practice as well, although circumstances may modify it a certain amount."
 (Jane Mitchell, my emphasis)

Several other themes emerged from an analysis of the data which strengthened the hypothesis that it was the kind of relationship between adult and child which these parents saw as crucial to a non-sexist upbringing, rather than the provision of a particular kind of model for the child to imitate or particular toys and books to shape their ideas in the required direction. One was the emphasis in many parents' accounts on the importance not only of men being involved in childcare, but of their being involved with their children in a particularly close, nurturant way that is usually characterised as 'mothering'. The second was the way parents handled the dilemma of needing to find alternative caretakers for their children while they worked and the fact that these caretakers were generally fairly traditional in their sex role attitudes and behaviours. The third was the connection between the parents' ability to raise a non-stereotyped child and the extent to which they had been able to free themselves from prejudice and repression and to establish an open, non-authoritarian relationship with the child. Each of these themes is explored in the rest of this chapter.

8.3 Father's Involvement in Childcare

Various social learning theorists have pointed out the similarity between the psychodynamic notion of identification

and their own concept of imitation. Both involve observational learning, in that behaviours are acquired through observation of a model engaged in them. However whereas cognitive and affective elements are sometimes mentioned in social learning theory they are subordinated to the learning of discrete responses and the shaping of the child's behaviour, whereas in the concept of identification these motivational aspects assume a major role, and what is important is the nature of the relationship between parent and child.

The way the parents in this study talked about men's involvement in childcare reflected this concern with the kind of relationship they were establishing with their children, and the effect of this on the child's personality. Feminist psychoanalytic theorists have argued that it is essential for men to be involved as nurturers of small children in order to alter gender-differentiated character structures, and it was this nurturing, emotional aspect of childcare which was often emphasised in the parents' accounts of men's involvement with their children.

"Andrew took an enormous share in looking after Karen, especially in the first year. I breast-fed her, but he used to do some of the night feeds with a bottle. I realised just how much he cared when I woke in the middle of the night and he'd taken off his pyjama top and was just holding her really close."

(Susan Durrant, daughter 8, son 7)

"We've both stepped out of the way our parents were with us by being openly physically affectionate. I think both Gavin and Bronwyn have got a fairly deep and strong relationship with both of us."
(Owen Thompson, son 5½, daughter 3½)

"I have a close physical relationship with both of them (sons 5 and 1½). I don't think I'd have found that so easy before I started co-counselling. The experience of getting in touch with my own emotions and finding out what that really meant to me, the release it gave me, made me appreciate the importance of it for them as well, and helped make me more responsive to them."
(Jeff Brierley, sons 5 and 1½)

"I feel I have a very feminine side to me, and I enjoy that. I'm emotional in ways that aren't encouraged in little boys at all. I really enjoy the 'nest-building' side of being at home with the children."
(John Noble, daughters 7 and 5)

Childcare was certainly not evenly divided between most parents in the study; mothers not only did more of the actual tasks but also bore the ultimate responsibility for children, as I shall explore further in chapter eleven. However, their concern that fathers be closely involved in both the practical and the emotional sides of caring for small children suggested that they saw changes in parent-child relationships and family dynamics as an important part of non-sexist childrearing.

8.4 Other Caretakers

The way in which parents dealt with the question of finding substitute caretakers for their children while they worked provided further support for the hypothesis

that it was the kind of relationship between adult and child which they saw as crucial for a non-sexist upbringing, rather than direct teaching of non-stereotyped behaviours. One of the paradoxes in the parents' attempts to alter traditional sex roles by both working outside the home, was that this usually entailed finding someone else to care for the children, and that these substitute caretakers were often not particularly committed to the 'non-sexist' ideas that the parents wished their children to learn. As Davidson and Gordon have pointed out, achievement-oriented women are probably less interested in entering childcare occupations because of the low pay and status, and feminists have tended to steer clear of such work because it is seen to reinforce women's traditional role with children. Men have also been reluctant to enter childcare professions, which Davidson and Gordon charitably suggest is due to the "primary provider role still held by husbands" which "makes childcare work economically unacceptable for many married men". (Davidson and Gordon 1979, 32)

Where both parents worked fulltime, children thus spent a large portion of their day with other caretakers - nursery staff, childminders or an au pair - who did not necessarily share the parents' views. (The same was obviously true once children started school, but that was not a function of both parents working.)

The arrangements parents had made for the care of their children were many and varied. Janet and Tony O'Brien shared their house with a succession of families in exchange for childcare, and Penny and Alan Griffiths had organised a cooperative nursery group with several friends, who together paid the salary for a trained nursery nurse to look after half a dozen children in each of their houses in turn. Jill and Steven Harrison paid a woman to come in and look after their two children during the day and to help with the housework. Jenny and Bob's twin daughters were looked after by both of them together for the first six months when neither was employed, then by Jenny for a year, followed by a university creche and then a childminder. Sheila Watson and Mary Lewis, both single parents with school-age children, used a combination of friends, relatives and flexible working hours to cope with after-school and holiday arrangements. Sarah Eichmann employed a childminder who often brought her baby son along to the children's centre where Sarah worked as a supervisor - "so he's around but not my responsibility - its a lovely set-up!"

These alternative caretakers were generally perceived as being fairly traditional in their ideas about sex roles.

"Julia is definitely much more traditional than I am in her ideas about boys and girls. She pays lip service to some sort of notion of not liking sex stereotyping, but in fact she does stereotype."
(Jill Harrison)

"Most of them (the people who've lived in their house and cared for their children) have embodied quite traditional sex roles, which we haven't made much effort to counter-act."

(Janet O'Brien)

"We found that even in the creche, with well qualified nursery nurses, they all held the view that little girls should be little girls and mothers should stay home and look after their children."

(Bob Perkins)

"I don't think that the au-pairs we've had have thought much about it really. . But what we have done, with each of them when they've come, is explain very carefully what our ideas are. So we've told them for example that they must never ever say to either of them that you can't do that because you're a girl or because you're a boy - just say you can't. And other things like sweets and our ideas about food . . . and they've been very happy to do this. We've been very lucky I think."

(Susan Durrant)

Not many parents felt able to discuss sex roles with the people who were caring for their children in the way that Susan and Andrew had done.

"Very, very difficult. I didn't really feel we could talk to Sandra (childminder) about it."

(Jenny Chadwick)

"We don't discuss it with Julia. It wouldn't be appropriate to do so, it'd be a sort of interference. Jill's on the nursery school committee and sometimes mentions things there, but never directly to Julia."

(Steven Harrison)

A common feature of the parents accounts of their childcare arrangements was the way in which they put the warmth and quality of the care above trying to find someone with non-

stereotyped ideas to care for their children.

"It's difficult to put into words how we choose someone . . . you feel this is a nice person, somebody who will get on with them - what's very important is to see how they react to the children and how the children react to them."
(Susan Durrant)

"We don't make an issue of sex-role stereotyping with our lodgers, partly because we don't want to be seen as laying down the laws for the house. It is our house, and it's quite difficult coming to live in someone else's house and not behaving like a guest. We wanted to get away from the idea that it's our house and we decide how things will be . . . and also there are other things that seem more important, like how well we get on with them - though I suppose ideas about sex roles are quite important in that. But I can imagine someone who had got all the right ideas about sex roles but you don't get on with them for one reason or another, and I'd rather have someone we got on with who was good with children."
(Janet O'Brien)

"Yes, the main criterion is that they're good with children, someone who can play with them and enjoy being with them."
(Tony O'Brien)

Penny Griffiths was unusual in involving Joan, the nursery nurse in their childcare cooperative, in her discussion with me. Joan said she wasn't in the women's liberation movement, but "I sort-of agree with this thing about being non-sexist. I never knew anything about it, to be honest, until I started working for Penny."

Penny: "I read female names instead of male ones in stories sometimes."

Joan: "Yes, I know. I started to do the same - well, I noticed you read a nursery rhyme book and changed all the nursery rhymes."

Penny: "Its 'Little Miss Muffet', and I always change that to Master Muffet."

Joan: "Yes, we have this nursery book and I asked Kathy to read it. I said one line and waited for the next to see which way she said it, so I'm learning from her really, what to say!"

Penny did discuss issues of sex role stereotyping with Joan in some detail.

"I talked to Joan a lot in the first place and said it was very important Kathryn played with constructional toys and motor cars and had lots of very active play, moving around physically, as well as playing with dolls, wheeling prams up and down and nursing babies."

But even for Penny, 'non-sexism' was not the main consideration in choosing a caretaker for their daughter.

"We both felt Joan was a really nice person and was going to be really good anyway, and it was after that that we talked to her."

Having "all the right ideas about sex roles", as Janet O'Brien put it, appeared to be less important than the ability to form a good relationship with the child. This good relationship was seen as necessary to enable the child to develop the kind of security and confidence which would then allow them to experiment outside of stereotyped sex roles.

8.5 Non-authoritarian relationships

Further evidence for the importance of the parent-child relationship in non-traditional sex role socialisation

was provided by my growing awareness as the research progressed, that while I had deliberately chosen to focus on parents' ideas about non-sexist childrearing and their overt, chosen behaviour in relation to their children and to each other, it was not always these chosen attitudes and behaviours that appeared to be most influential in producing a less stereotyped child, but other less easily observable and measurable factors of the parent-child relationship. While, since this was not the main focus of the study, I would not wish to make any definite statements about the role of personality factors in non-sexist childrearing, it did appear that an important factor in determining how successfully parents could help their children to be less stereotyped was the extent to which they had managed to free themselves of prejudice and repression and to establish an open and non-authoritarian relationship with their children. It seemed that it would be possible to be 'non-sexist' in ideology and practice, and yet that this would have little effect in terms of encouraging tolerance, a sense of equality and lack of stereotyping in their children if this new ideology was held in the context of a traditional, authoritarian relationship with the child. Most of the parents I talked to spoke about the importance of children being free to make up their own minds and of not wanting to exercise

too much censorship or control, but it was evident that there were different degrees of controllingness in their relationships with their children. It was not simply a question of permissiveness - in fact several parents who described themselves as 'fairly strict' or 'on the firm side, they know where they stand' were those who seemed least controlling. It was more a question of helping children to gain confidence in themselves and their abilities, allowing them the freedom to explore alternative ideas and giving them the psychological space to develop a sense of themselves as separate individuals leading their own lives.

"A mother can be just as controlling and intrusive in trying to get her daughter to play with trucks instead of dolls as any stereotyped mom may be in insisting that her daughter wear a certain frilly dress and keep it clean. The more superficial aspects of gender roles are less important than a child's sense that she is respected as a separate person."
(Signe Hammer 1976, 35)

Some parents in the study appeared to be intensely involved with their children, worrying over them, needing to know where they were and who they were with and how they were feeling. Other parents could be equally close to their children, yet more relaxed and able to 'let go'. On the basis of the impressions I gained from the interviews and from meeting most of the children, the second

style seemed more conducive to encouraging the kind of security and sense of autonomy that these parents felt would enable a child to behave in a less sex-stereotyped way. Kay and Owen Thompson spent ten minutes of 'special time' each evening with their two children and appeared to have a warm, close relationship with them, but they both had full lives and interests apart from their children and wanted the children to be in control of their own lives as far as possible:

"Letting them make their own decisions is a key part of our relationship with them."
(Owen Thompson)

Jane Mitchell's relationship with her three older teenage children seemed to be much more one of equals and friends than of mother and dependent children. Many of my questions in the interview were politely but firmly rejected as irrelevant - partly on the grounds of the children's age, but also on the grounds that she saw them very much as individuals in their own right. "They look after me as much as I look after them." "I don't need to do that (encourage them to question sex roles in books and on television) - they do it themselves." "I don't know how much I've influenced their ideas. They influence me too. They're people, I can't say what aspects of their characters have been determined by me." Jane's fifteen-year-old son cooked lunch while she talked to me,

and over the meal he and his sister discussed divorce, how long each of them had been breastfed, and which characteristics they thought they'd inherited from each of their parents. There was a good-humoured trading-off of jobs around the house, and much physical affection between them. At 19, 17 and 15 Jane's children were much older than those included in the study, and this age difference obviously affected the parent-child relationship, but the same style of relating and respect for the other's individuality was also evident in Jane's relationship with two-year-old Ellen.

Thus one of the hypotheses to emerge from the research was that a less tangible, but nonetheless important, aspect of non-sexist childrearing was the parents' ability to be open and non-authoritarian with their children, and to allow them the psychological space to develop their own separate identities.

8.6 Summary

In the last three chapters I have presented the data describing how the consciously 'non-sexist' parents in this study tried to put their ideas into practice in bringing up their children. Altering traditional reinforcement patterns undoubtedly played a part in the parents' conceptions of non-sexist childrearing.

Providing 'opposite-sex' toys and games, rewarding the child for non-stereotyped behaviour, and altering the models presented to children in books and on television, were all seen to prevent children from uncritically accepting that sex was a justifiable basis on which to categorise behaviour, and to encourage them not to close off future options by early sex-typed choices, for instance, girls rejecting science subjects in school as 'unfeminine' and then being unable to enter many careers requiring scientific or technical skills. It has been argued in this vein that traditional sex role socialisation "narrows and channels the child's early androgyny, interdicting some of its manifestations". (Judith Long-Laws 1979, 337)

However, the same author points to the danger of regarding socialisation as a new form of determinism.

"Sex role socialisation is not implanted in personality like an electrode of the brain . . . the individual can choose to resist or transcend the effects of early socialisation . . . she constructs her identity, and can construct her significant social environment."
(Long-Laws 1979, 294)

It was the rejection of this behaviourist aspect of sex role socialisation which characterised the parents' accounts of non-sexist childrearing. Establishing an open relationship with their child appeared to be more central than did the issues of toy and book provision, and was reflected in

their concern to avoid censorship, their emphasis on discussion, their respect for the child's individuality and their desire for men to be involved in a nurturing role in early childcare.

A mechanistic explanation of sex role learning also proved inadequate in its inability to account for some of the difficulties faced by parents attempting to alter traditional sex role stereotypes. It implies that stereotypes are arbitrary and that parents can simply choose to 'shape' their children in a different direction.

Although social learning theorists acknowledge that other influences affect the child, and that the parents' attempts at non-traditional sex role socialisation may well be hindered by reinforcement of traditional stereotypes from relatives, the school, toy manufacturers and the media, there is little attempt to explain why this should be so. Although the social learning position characterised much of the writing of the early women's movement, feminists have since developed both structural and psychological analyses of sexual inequality. In the next chapters I will illustrate some of the difficulties and limitations which parents experienced in attempting to put their non-sexist ideals into practice, and show how these analyses provide a framework for understanding some of the difficulties parents faced which is absent

from a model of sex role socialisation as a mechanistic,
arbitrary phenomenon.

CHAPTER NINE

LIMITS: THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

9.0 Introduction

The role of the education system in perpetuating traditional sex role stereotypes featured prominently in early feminist accounts of sexual discrimination. There was much concern with the way in which schools discriminated between children on the grounds of sex and reinforced stereotyped notions of masculinity and femininity, and this concern was often extended to include the role of the media and relatives in reinforcing similar stereotypes. From the perspective of parents trying to bring up their children to feel and behave in non-stereotyped ways, these other socialising agents have a powerful potential for undermining their non-conformist ideas, and require that any non-sexist childrearing policy include a consideration of how best to counteract these other influences on children. I described earlier how parents had dealt with sex role stereotyping in the media, through discussing and criticising television programmes and advertisements, sometimes through banning certain programmes, and through altering or commenting on children's reading material. Relatives could have been another source

of stereotyped information, but although many parents reported that their own parents did hold traditional ideas about sex roles, they generally felt that the children didn't see enough of them for this to be much of a problem. Grandparents usually lived some distance away (a reflection of the geographical mobility of a predominantly middle-class sample) and were not seen as exerting much influence on children's ideas.

"We didn't have the problem of conflicting family pressures because our families live so far away and because we were both independent of them for a long time before we came together."

(Jenny Chadwick, twin daughters 3½)

Although parents sometimes referred with exasperation to the way their own parents encouraged traditional sex-role behaviour, this counter-information generally appeared not to worry them unduly, and not only because children rarely saw enough of their grandparents for them to exert a great influence. In the same way that the parents in this study valued children having a good relationship with their substitute caretakers more highly than the necessity for those caretakers to hold non-sexist ideals, so they emphasised the quality of the relationship between children and their grandparents, and generally showed little concern that relatives differed in their views on sex roles.

"My parents have very different ideas from us about things like guns and sweets and clothes,

as well as sex roles, but I think the most important thing is that they're very much loved and have a good time and have a good relationship with their grandparents. They know what we feel, and they just go there for a week then come home. Its easier now they're older and realise there can be two different sets of rules for different occasions, which was a very hard thing for them to grasp when they were a bit younger." (Susan Durrant, daughter 8, son 7)

"I don't think that hurts" (that grandparents have different ideas). "If they had a lot of contact with them we'd probably have to say, like we did over the school and religion, that 'grandma thinks this but we think that' - but they don't see them very often, so they just enjoy their company." (Kay Thompson, son 5½, daughter 3½)

9.1 The School

Unlike sporadic visits to grandparents, however, the time children spent in school formed a major part of their lives. Despite the Sex Discrimination Act of 1975 and attempts by a few teachers to develop non-sexist curricula and teaching methods, the education system remains a strong reinforcer of traditional sex roles. Starting school was seen by parents to have a double effect on children's perceptions of sex roles. They were concerned on the one hand with the kind of discrimination on the grounds of sex, in both the overt and the 'hidden' curriculum, that has been documented by various authors. (Deem 1978, Delamont 1980b, Lobban 1977, Spender 1980). These include the bias in textbooks and

teaching materials, different expectations of and behaviour towards girls and boys, unequal resource allocation, the restriction of certain subjects or subject combinations to one sex, and the preponderance of men in positions of authority within the education system.

Secondly, they felt that school affected their children's ideas through being the place where the peer group makes its influence the most strongly felt. Once children started school, friends became increasingly important in determining their values and behaviour, and as Weitz has observed, "the peer group is an important mediator (and often exaggerator) of the sex-stereotyped values of the culture." (Weitz, 1977)

In terms of discrimination on the grounds of sex, practically every parent in the study with a school-aged child could supply numerous examples of sex stereotyping that had occurred at school. In fact the process began earlier, in the nursery school.

"Mrs White had drawn chalk lines on the floor and the girls were standing on one and the boys on the other, singing songs. I didn't say anything. - it was the first day!"
(Janet O'Brien, daughters 5 and 2)

"Father Christmas gave guns to all the boys and teasetts to all the girls!"
(Jill Harrison, son 4, daughter 1½)

"Their nursery school teacher tended to reinforce traditional sex roles - not so much consciously, she'd say things like 'I encourage the boys to wash the dolly's clothes as well', but when you actually walked in there you'd find the boys making aeroplanes out of lego bricks and the girls in the Wendy House."

(Jenny Chadwick, twin daughters 6)

Primary school continued the process:

"It's not subtle sexism at all, its really overt. The teacher lines them up in lines of boys and girls, and at the end of the day kisses each of the girls on the head as they go out and gets the boys to salute."

(Mark Bates, daughter 5)

"Girls aren't allowed to wear trousers at her school. When I asked the headmistress why, she just said that the school was very hot and little girls would get hot if they wore trousers all day. Little boys wear trousers all day, but she couldn't explain that. . . she said if its cold, they can wear trousers under their dress to go to school and then take them off when they get there!"

(Rosemary Simpson, daughter 6)

Occasionally parents reported more favourable experiences with the school. Sheila Watson felt she was "very lucky" with Joanna's first teacher, who seemed keen to break down traditional sex roles. "She was very sympathetic. I used to help out in the school sometimes, and I'd point out to the teacher when I thought the material was sexist and she'd agree." At secondary school, Joanna had a male teacher who raised sex role issues in civics lessons, and her class teacher was also sympathetic. "She's just discovered her class teacher is a feminist. She

noticed she was down as Ms rather than Miss and asked her why, and her teacher said they'd printed it wrong before." This teacher was active in N.U.T. women's groups, altered sexist language in textbooks and corrected pupils' stereotyped remarks. "Joanna picks up on things like that, it reinforces what she already knows."

Such experiences were definitely uncommon. The majority of parents reported that the school reinforced traditional ideas about sex roles. However, they attached varying degrees of importance to this sex role stereotyping, from those parents who thought it didn't matter too much, since they saw the home as the main influence and felt that children were just trying out ideas they learnt at school which would soon 'wash away', to those like Susan Durrant who felt that "The school is the major factor, as I see it, in the formation of conformist behaviour to gender roles". They also varied in the kind of practices they objected to on the grounds of sex role stereotyping. Janet O'Brien felt some aspects of sex differentiation were often overemphasised by feminists:

"I'm not particularly bothered about sex differentiation in sport, football and rounders - I wouldn't choose it, but I wouldn't kick up a fuss about it. And I think there's a lot of overemphasis on sexist textbooks, in the sense that it's an easy thing to pick on but I've never seen anything that's convinced me it has that much of an effect. But I do think the skills thing is important, if they're prevented from learning skills like needlework or woodwork." (Janet O'Brien, daughters 5 and 2)

Susan Durrant, on the other hand, objected strongly to the pervasive division of children into girls and boys for activities where she saw their sex as totally irrelevant:

"At Karen's primary school boys and girls were always differentiated - in the box in which they put their dinner money, in the register, in the side of the classroom in which they hung their coats, etc. not to mention visual material and readers. Dressing-up had a boys' and girls' box too, with cowboys for boys, brides and nurses for girls . . . At junior school the overt sexism included no trousers for girls, separate playgrounds, separate games with no football for girls, etc. etc."

(Susan Durrant, daughter 8, son 7)

9.2 Counteracting the School's influence

The strategies parents had adopted to deal with the effect of the school on children's ideas about sex roles fell into three main categories; trying to influence the school and make it a less stereotyped environment, trying to influence their children so they could cope with and criticise this environment themselves, and trying to select a 'good' school for their own child. None had considered educating their child out of school altogether except Sue MacMillan, whose community had some experience of deschooling, and her son was too young for her to have any clear idea of what she would do when he reached the age of five. Many had tried all three of the above strategies at some stage in their child's school career.

Each strategy appeared to have its advantages and its drawbacks. Attempting to influence the school's policies made more political sense to some parents than looking for an individual solution for their child. Jane Mitchell expressed a 'political unease' over the latter solution.

"I feel that if I did believe strongly in the effects of what happens in school (though I've a slight scepticism about the degree of difference it does really make), then I should be fighting in the local school not sending my child off to be privileged in a different one. But that kind of argument is something my parents and I are quite split over. My mother often says quite bitterly that I ruined my children's education by sending them to comprehensive schools. She feels that's putting political principles before their particular interests, and I shouldn't do that."
(Jane Mitchell, daughter 2 and three teenage children)

Trying to change the school was seen as having the further advantage of taking the pressure off the child, and placing the onus for less stereotyped behaviour on the school instead.

"We'd try and influence the school rather than keep her as an odd one out in what we may regard as an undesirable environment. If we just tried to indoctrinate her against that, then she'd become the odd one out."
(Alan Patterson, daughter 3)

However, influencing the schools' policies was no easy task, and those parents who had tried it mostly described the process as a difficult and exhausting one. Susan and Andrew Durrant had been very concerned about the sex role

stereotyping in Karen's junior school and had tried to do something about it. They talked to the Head and raised the issue through the Parents' Association, and Karen herself got up a petition with a hundred signatures asking for girls to be allowed to wear trousers, but all to no avail. Disillusioned with the school and worn out by their attempts to change its policies, Susan and Andrew transferred their children to another school in a working-class area of their town, with far fewer facilities:

"During the holidays we had realised what a relief it was not to be in constant battle with the school, and for the children not constantly to have to move between two value systems, home and school."

This new school was less discriminatory, although it was by no means completely free of sex role stereotyping. However, Andrew and Susan did not raise the issue again, partly because "after three years of struggling with the old school, I felt I couldn't cope with any more", and partly because "Karen was at that time getting fed up with what she perceived as my negative and critical attitude to 'everything'. "Don't you like anything?", she'd ask me."

(Susan Durrant)

Ironically, withdrawing their children seemed to have the effect that campaigning within the school had failed to achieve.

"That same term, the playgrounds were desegregated and girls' football team was formed. Other parents told us the head feared an exodus of the children of 'trendy lefties' like us!"

(Susan Durrant)

Another way which some parents had tried to raise the schools' consciousness over issues of sex role stereotyping was to show teachers various reports and articles which criticized discriminatory practices. Janet O'Brien sent her daughter's headmistress a copy of the Equal Opportunities Commission's report on science education for girls, and Kay Thompson said she planned to take in an article about differences in teachers' behaviour towards girls and boys to show to the teachers at the small village school her son attended.

"I wouldn't want to go in and say 'you should do this and this and this', but I think good conscientious teachers like they are should have that information.

(Kay Thompson, son 5½, daughter 3½)

Other parents tried to make the school a less stereotyped environment by their own example, with fathers getting involved in cookery and swimming lessons (when their jobs permitted).

The overall impression gained from talking to these parents, however, was that on the whole they didn't expect or try to make much of an impression on sex role stereotyping in the schools. They were more likely to adopt the second strategy of trying to help their child

to cope with and criticise the stereotyping that went on there, in line with their emphasis on the child's active role in sex role development.

"I think he suffers a lot at school, because people actually call him weak, and he doesn't fight. He says sometimes 'I'd like to just sit, but whenever you sit, somebody comes over and tumbles you over' - and that's not a rough school! We do a lot of talking with him about it, give him a lot of support and talk about the fact that bodily strength is not what really counts, you know . . . We've no control at all over the school, there's very little parent involvement. The only thing I feel I can do is to keep my relationship with him as alive and important as possible, so that the things I say will influence him and make him aware of what's happening. But that's as far as I can go."

(Jeanne Rosen, son 8)

"I just try and point out things to her that she'd maybe take for granted otherwise, like girls not being allowed to wear trousers. There's nothing I can do about it, but I point it out so she's aware that somebody's imposing a difference on us."

(Rosemary Simpson, daughter 6)

"She'll come in sometimes and say 'it's not fair, at school they say 'we want six strong boys to move these boxes', but we can carry the boxes just as well and the boys get packets of crisps so its doubly unfair'. She says she doesn't quite like to say things like that at school, and I don't want to push her - I'm not in the situation. But I think its its important she's aware of it."

(Sheila Watson, daughter 9)

The parents' emphasis on helping the child to be aware and critical of the sex role stereotyping they encountered at school, rather than (or sometimes as well as) trying to alter the schools' policies, also reflected the fact that they perceived reinforcement for traditional sex roles

as coming as much from the child's peers as from the discrimination the children observed and experienced in the organisation and teaching of the school. Their emphasis on the importance of the peer group did not deny the necessity for institutional change. In fact it underlined it; had the schools had an explicit policy of fostering sexual equality then the peer group influence could well have been less traditional. In most cases, however, social pressure from other children was seen as one of the strongest sources of conformity to traditional roles. The messages children learn in the playground, in the world of best friends and school gangs, have a powerful influence on their attitudes and behaviour which is largely hidden from adults (apart from the occasional observer like Andy Sluckin, who vividly describes some aspects of this 'playground culture' in his book 'Growing up in the Playground'). Parents do, however, observe its effects on their children's ideas and behaviour.

"Brian has changed since going to school, he seems to be much more aware of his maleness and more self-conscious and extrovert about it, especially when he's with certain boys of his own age. He gets a lot of pressure from his friends, not to cry and to be big and brave."
(Jeff Brierly, sons 5 and 1½)

"She comes back with loads of sexist things from school. Lately she always wants to wear a dress, she won't wear trousers even when its really cold and it'd be practical. She's got a pair

of shoes which happen to have a big heel, and she always wants to wear them - she says it makes her taller, but it seems to be linked with all sorts of things, with some of the other girls in her class wearing high heels."
(Liz Bates, daughter 5)

"In many ways he has a different set of behaviours for school and home, although we see the playground toughie Gary when he brings friends home and becomes immediately totally obnoxious and oblivious."
(Susan Durrant, daughter 8, son 7)

This source of influence, from the child's peers, was the one which parents felt least able to counteract, except by stressing an alternative point of view and by trying to build the child's self-confidence and sense of autonomy so they would be more able to stand up for their own ideas in the face of peer pressure. Many parents expressed reservations about making their child too 'different' at school, and acknowledged the importance of the child getting on well with school friends and not feeling an 'odd one out'. This again limited the lengths to which they were prepared to take their non-sexist policies, particularly with younger children.

"The real problem is that what you do is reflected through the child, and whether the child can handle whatever tensions develop in the school over the questions you've raised with them. So we'll give in over school uniform, because you can't land a five-year-old with that sort of battle, because they can't fight it, they're not ready for it, and it just gets in the way of the other things they want to do."
(Bob Perkins, twin daughters 3½)

"You have to ease off in a way. She has a right to say she wants to wear a dress, and though you might not agree with what you think are the motives, she's got to survive in a tough school environment."

(Mark Bates, daughter 5)

"The thing with school is, I don't know what happens in school but I think the social relationships are very important and I can't sort of break into it and make my child different. The more different I want to make him, the more similar he'll want to be! So I think whatever's there has to be gone through - with comments maybe, but it certainly has to be gone through."

(Jeanne Rosen, son 8)

"I think especially for boys, the way they fit in socially and get friends is by joining the gangs, and a boy who was a bit different could get isolated. I've always assumed he'd go to school and I want him to manage, which would probably mean having to learn a lot of the behaviour you have to learn to survive. I'd like it best if he could have in perspective what he's doing and not get totally lost in it, but see it instead as a tactic for managing at school. I'd like him to see that, rather than become that person. But I worry that school has such a profound influence and might change him so much, that it mightn't be worth the risk. He might really become horrible! I suppose if it went too far I might try to bring him up out of school, with other children."

(Sue MacMillan, son 1½)

It appeared that many parents accepted that their child would almost inevitably go through a 'stage' of being traditionally sex-typed in their ideas and behaviour for the first few years of full-time schooling, and that there was little they could do about this apart from making their own point of view known and hoping the child would be influenced by this in the longer term.

"Once she starts school I think it'll be more of a holding operation. That's why its so important what we do in the first few years because that's when the basis is laid for the way she herself is able to cope with whatever comes up. I think she'll go through a very conventional phase when she's at school, but she'll emerge as something completely different at the end."

(Alan Patterson, daughter 3)

"I think they go through a stage when they start school when everything the teacher and their friends say is absolute gospel, and there's no way you can contradict it. But I think in the long term our influence will probably be the more fundamental one."

(Jenny Chadwick, twin daughters 6)

It certainly appeared that as they got older children were more able to deal with the conflict of values between home and school, and to stand up for their own ideas in the face of peer pressure. Susan Durrant felt that her daughter Karen had "grown more mature and more able to cope with this sort of conflict" by the time she was eight, and Mary Lewis described how eleven-year-old David was now prepared to disagree with his male friends when they made cutting comments about women drivers or objected to cookery lessons for boys.

"He'll come home and say he's been chatting to a group of girls in the playground and the boys will come up and tease him. He does find that hard. But again, he's more able to cope with that now, he'll just tell them you can talk to girls without them being girlfriends."

(Mary Lewis, son 11, daughter 7)

The third way in which parents tried to deal with the influence of the education system on their children's ideas was to look for the school in their area which seemed least stereotyped in its organisation and teaching, rather than to try to alter the school the child was in, or to hope they could counteract its influence. Although the school's policy on sex roles was something several parents reported as being a factor in their choice of primary school, it seemed to arise as a particularly pertinent issue as secondary schooling approached, and was often focussed around the question of mixed versus single-sex schooling. The evidence from the available research on the merits of co-educational schooling for girls and for boys appears inconclusive. Earlier research seemed to indicate that girls generally did better academically in single-sex schools, boys in mixed ones (Dale, 1971, Ormerod, 1975). Girls were more likely to do maths, science and other 'masculine' subjects in an all-girl than in a co-educational school, and to see women in positions of authority and power. Jennifer Shaw described mixed schools as "boys' schools with girls in them", with the teaching geared towards boys' interests and with boys using girls as a kind of negative reference group so that they could avoid feelings of failure "by defining themselves as being, whatever else, at least not a girl." (Shaw, 1980) Other researchers

have reached differing conclusions. Ann Bane's review of the research on single-sex versus co-educational schooling for the G.O.C. concluded that when class and ability were controlled for, the sex composition of the school had little effect on attainment (Bane 1983).

I.L.E.A.'s 1982 report likewise found little evidence to support the notion that girls do better in single-sex schools (ILEA 1982). However, it is still a widespread belief among feminists that they do, and it was thus not surprising to find in this study that it was the parents of girls who were particularly concerned about the issue of single-sex schooling.

They divided fairly evenly into those who supported it, and those who felt that mixed schooling was preferable. Intellectual achievement was not the only criterion; social factors were also considered by many parents. Encouraging the sexes to co-operate with and respect each other was something which almost all parents saw as an important part of their non-sexist childrearing philosophy, but they were less unanimous over the kind of schooling they thought was most likely to foster this kind of relationship:

"In mixed schools, girls often orientate themselves around boys . . . I think given the way things are I'd rather she went to a single-sex school."
(Liz Bates, daughter 5)

"I think its important there's a good mixture of social classes and races and sexes in her secondary school. I'd like to send her to a school that had a 90% immigrant population as little as I'd like to send her to a single-sex school, because I don't think either of them are healthy environments."

(Alan Patterson, daughter 3)

The rationale that single-sex schools shielded girls from the effects of sexism was one which some parents treated with a certain degree of scepticism.

"I went to an all-girls school myself, and did well there. There were sixteen of us doing 'A' level science. But although there was no actual confrontation with society's view of what I should be doing as a female, although we were protected from that by being only girls and women there, it was as if I was being covered in glue at that time and then when I got out of school I got stuck to the paper! All those attitudes were implicit in what was happening at my school."

(Kay Thompson)

Parents of boys were far less likely to worry over the single sex/mixed schooling issue, although as one mother (with a daughter) pointed out, "if single sex schooling is best for girls and co-educational best for boys, then we've got a logical problem somewhere!". Mostly parents with sons assumed that they would attend a mixed comprehensive school, which is perhaps not surprising since there was a strong emphasis in most parents' accounts of what non-sexist childrearing meant for boys, on encouraging them to learn to relate to girls as equals - which is likely to be more difficult if the sexes are educated apart, and have little opportunity to relate

to each other at all.

There was no single policy which non-sexist parents followed over the education of their children, simply because there was no one obvious solution. The kind of schooling they wanted for their children just did not exist. While an ideal for most would have been a co-educational comprehensive state school where both girls and boys could develop their interests, intellectual abilities and social skills unhampered by stereotypes, the realities of educational discrimination and traditional relationships between the sexes in most secondary schools often forced parents to compromise their stance on sex-stereotyping, or to forego some other political principle. Susan and Andrew Durrant, having surveyed the four possible schools in their borough for their daughter Karen and been dismayed by what they found ("In neither single or mixed-sex schools was there the remotest awareness on issues of sex stereotyping, problems of girls or sexism generally, and no attempt to help girls (or boys) choose non-traditional subjects"), finally chose to send Karen to a voluntary-aided all-girls comprehensive school outside their own area.

"It was a dilemma. It was quite far away, and many of the girls won't be her neighbours. More importantly it's a voluntary-aided school,

which as we've always politically supported a total state system means a real compromise in sending her there. But we felt it was the only school that had some inkling of what girls' education is about, and is probably a place where Karen is more likely to meet girls from families like ours. In any of the schools in our borough, her feminist ideas are likely to put her in a minority of one."

(Susan Durrant)

Jeanne Rosen expressed some ambivalence about sending her son Josh to an all-boys grammar school.

"Choosing a secondary school was a very difficult problem. There are two mixed schools in the area, and a third school which he'd heard of and wanted me to visit. His main concern was to go to a school where it wouldn't be rough, and both those schools are rough . . . so the school he has finally chosen is the single-sex school around the corner. I don't feel terribly happy about that aspect of things. I keep hoping some of his friends will have sisters. But on the other hand I think that that school can cope with a large variety of personalities, they don't have to do the boyish things at lunchtime but can go to the library or do experiments . . . though I admit I feel it would be better if the school was mixed. It is a problem."

(Jeanne Rosen, son 11)

9.3 Summary

The education system was thus seen by most parents as a fairly powerful force limiting the extent to which they felt able to bring up their children in a less sex-stereotyped way. It exerted its influence partly through discrimination in the organisation and teaching of the schools, in both the official curriculum and in the 'hidden' curriculum of expectations and attitudes; and partly through the social pressure of other children to

conform to traditional gender roles, which was in most cases encouraged - or at the least tolerated - by the teachers. However this influence was not viewed in the deterministic way that characterises the social learning position on sex role development. Non-sexist parents concentrated their efforts on helping the child to be aware and critical of this sex role stereotyping at school, rather than trying to change it. Their task would undoubtedly have been easier had the schools also had a policy of minimising sex roles, and several parents mentioned the need for sex role issues to be included in teacher training courses, but their emphasis was on the way children interacted with the sex role information they were receiving at school, and on such factors as the child's ability to make sense of conflicting messages and to cope with holding different ideas from their peers. The parents perceived the school as exerting its influence on children's sex role behaviour and attitudes through a complex interaction involving the child's desires and motivations rather than through a simple moulding of the child's behaviour.

In the next two chapters I shall analyse two other major sources of limitation on the extent to which the parents' non-sexist ideals could be put into practice, which also move beyond the view of sex role socialisation as an

arbitrary, mechanistic process. Chapter 10 investigates the extent to which economic factors in the organisation of our society hindered the parents' attempts at non-traditional sex-role socialisation, and chapter 11 brings together some of the psychological aspects connected with power, privilege and personality structures which often made it difficult for parents to engage in non-stereotyped behaviour even when they consciously desired to do so, and which in particular made them more ambivalent about raising sons than daughters in a non-sexist way.

CHAPTER 10LIMITS : ECONOMIC CONSTRAINTS10.0 Introduction

An increasingly prominent theme which emerged as the research progressed was that attempting to provide children with 'non-sexist' models of men and women sharing and equally valued both inside and outside the home was not an easy task, and that many of the difficulties that the parents experienced were due to structural factors in the organisation of a capitalist society. Such factors hindered even the more materially privileged of the middle-class families in this study; for working-class families the difficulties would likely be even greater. When productive work is separated from the family, and women required to stay at home maintaining the present labour force and producing the next generation of workers (or themselves providing a cheap and expendable secondary labour force), then women are not able to participate equally in the labour market, nor do men take on an equal share of domestic work. The organisation of society around nuclear families in which the man goes out to work while the woman cares for home and children is maintained by structural factors which make alternative arrangements difficult; the low pay and status attached to women's work, inadequate childcare provision, few opportunities for jobs to be shared or held part-time

with the same fringe benefits as fulltime work, and a 'masculine' work ethos that stresses competition, overtime and 'getting on' at the expense of family responsibilities. Each of these affected the ability of the families I studied to bring up their children in a less sex-stereotyped way.

10.1 Economic Discrimination

In 1981, the official government report 'Social Trends' showed that women remain in sex-segregated areas of employment - clerical, secretarial and the 'caring' professions; food and clothing manufacture, retail selling and low-level occupations such as hairdressing and cleaning. (Social Trends, 1981) Their pay levels, despite the 1970 Equal Pay Act, were still less than 75% of male wages (Hakim 1981). This imbalance in occupational opportunities and rewards makes it difficult to show children that women can be equally valuable in the world of paid work. Either women stay at home, because the work available to them is so unattractive, or they stay at home because the cost of childcare makes fulltime working economically impossible, given the kind of work women are likely to get. (Part-time work that can be fitted around looking after children is a different matter - despite the extremely low rates of pay it is financially necessary for many families.) As Polatnick puts it: 'Economic discrimination provides

males with a substantial edge in earning power, thus making it difficult to break the pattern of male breadwinner/female childrearer' (Polatnick 1974, 57).

There was only one family in my study where the woman (Helen Powell) could earn substantially more than the man, and because the demanding, competitive nature of her job as an industrial editor made it difficult to combine with childcare, Derek Powell had given up his own job to look after their four fostered school-age children. In most cases the women could earn less, and as Bob Perkins pointed out, this combined with the high cost of childcare to create difficulties for those parents who wanted to both work full time and share family responsibilities.

"We've only got as far as we have by being prepared to lay out huge sums of money for childcare, which leaves us broke. When you're talking about working class families doing it (sharing paid work and domestic work), especially doing it when the husband's not really committed to the idea, then economically there would be so many arguments against it that I'd have thought in those families it would just get squashed. There is much more leeway in middle-class jobs, like lecturing - they've much more ability to cope with the crises. There's a material basis to the whole question which has to be settled at a higher level than the home."
(Bob Perkins)

If they do go out to work, economic discrimination still affects women's ability to provide non-stereotyped models since they are more likely to be in less prestigious occupations, again those which can be fitted around the

demands of child-rearing. What Joseph Pleck has rather grandly termed 'asymmetrically permeable boundaries' operate between work and family roles for men and women: women are expected to allow the needs of their family to interfere with outside work and to take time off for childcare crises, men to allow their work role to interfere with their family role by taking work home or needing family time to recover from work stress (Pleck 1977b).

In the 1979 Gallup Poll survey of women's work, commissioned by 'Woman's Own', women with children held the jobs with the lowest pay and status because of the expectation that they fit their work around their family responsibilities in a way that men were not expected to do. "Even in families where the mother works full time, three-quarters of the fathers never take time off work if their children are ill and never collect them from school". (Woman's Own 1979). Presumably the men's jobs wouldn't allow them to, but in the absence of adequate childcare provision someone has to take on this responsibility, and in general it is mothers who do so, and bear the cost of having lower-grade jobs. Non-sexist parents were not exempt from the effects of this economic discrimination. Although most of the mothers I talked to were in a relatively privileged position in that most of them had access to academic-type work, and many of the fathers to the kind of jobs that did permit them some flexibility in working

hours, it was still mostly mothers that children saw taking time off if they were ill or on holiday.

"Its me they see having to take time off, because we can't afford to lose Bob's pay. So long as he can earn more, I'll always have to take jobs that will allow me to take time off."
(Jenny Chadwick)

The messages children are likely to learn from this are that women's work is less important, and family responsibilities her main consideration.

"I think it probably does give them different ideas about the value of men's and women's work. They see Jenny doing temporary jobs in the holidays, whereas particularly when I first started work, there was this feeling that I had to be there. Every time I was out of the factory we lost money, and we were struggling financially anyway, so it wasn't possible to take time off. I think it does come back to the economic problem that if you're in a working class job you need to be there because if you're not you don't get paid. So I think they knew I had to go to work, whatever occurred, whereas Jenny would stay at home if it was necessary.
(Bob Perkins)

10.2 Inadequate childcare provision

The lack of good-quality, low-cost childcare detailed in chapter 1.5 was a powerful factor in maintaining traditional sex roles. The strain and worry of combining work and family roles falls on families, rather than on employers or the government - and more often than not on mothers to a greater extent than on fathers.

"Childcare is a worry, all the time. And especially in the holidays, there's so much planning and organisation, no routines to save you thinking about it. It'll be a continual problem until they're

teenagers and old enough to be left alone. Its not soluble with the present system."

(Jenny Chadwick, twin daughters 6)

"After school and half-terms . . . that's everybody's nightmare."

(Sheila Watson, daughter 9)

"We didn't have anyone living in when they were small. We had jobs where we were able to chop and change about a bit - teaching and research work. We did pay for various kinds of help. At one time we had our next door neighbour, a woman who was about sixty, who used to take Karen for afternoons. Then there was another woman who also took her some afternoons. She started playgroup when she was two-and-a-half . . . Gary went to a childminder for a year or so. Later on we found a schoolgirl who used to come after school from four to six and play with the children - that was a great success, we went through four members of that family! Oh, and I forgot to mention all the reciprocal childcare arrangements with friends. Most of the arrangements we've made were satisfactory in themselves, but you were never totally sure, so if somebody was ill then we really got stuck, or if one of the children was ill, or if the child of one of the friends who was going to have the child that day was ill . . . you know, it was all, there were lots of last minute panics and emergencies which caused a lot of worry. Looking back, given that there are not adequate nursery facilities, I think we ought to have had somebody living in at an earlier stage - though the house we had then was tiny, and we didn't really have the money either."

(Susan Durrant, daughter 8, son 7)

The paucity and the expense of childcare facilities had several consequences for parents trying to bring up their children in a less sex-stereotyped way. Firstly, as described in 8.4, it meant that the children often spent much of their time with other caretakers who because of the low pay and status of childcare work were likely to

reinforce traditional stereotypes. Secondly, it restricted the careers of women more than men, since even in these families it was mostly the women who retained the basic responsibility for making arrangements for their children while they worked. (This allocation of responsibility is reflected even in the sympathetic literature, where childcare facilities are seen as necessary to enable women to work. Paternal responsibilities are rarely mentioned.) Given the lack of structural support for working parents, one person's work had to be able to cope with the demands of childcare (taking time off when the children were ill or on holiday, visits to the doctor or dentist, settling in to the nursery), and it tended to be the woman's work. Although the fathers in my study were prepared to take advantage of the flexibility in their jobs to be more involved with their children, it was in the majority of cases the women who had based their choice of occupation on its ability to fit around these responsibilities.

Studying was a popular choice that provided this flexibility, but tended to reinforce traditional roles. Liz Bates was the one who looked after five-year-old Rosie if she was sick, because Mark had a paid job and she was on a grant.

"Its the fact that we've got very different jobs,
and one allows much more flexibility".
(Mark Bates)

Similarly Jenny Chadwick rather than Bob took time off if one of their daughters was ill (which when Lucy developed asthma became a fairly frequent occurrence), because she could miss lectures more easily than he could stay away from work. When Lucy went through a particularly bad period with her asthma attacks, it was Jenny who was able to organise her work to cope with this.

"I was at college so I just took the time off. There were terms when I had to have two weeks off out of a ten-week term. I spread my work out over an extra term and took the minimum number of modules . . . if I'd taken more I might have got a better grade."
(Jenny Chadwick)

And Patricia Noble:

"I found it quite easy to fit the children in with my work, partly because I had the kind of jobs which I could do mainly when I liked, when the children were asleep or in the evenings or at weekends when John was at home, or when they went to my parents. Things like marking scripts and giving tutorials at home."

When Patricia took a fulltime job after her second daughter started school, an important criterion was that the work could be combined with childcare responsibilities.

"Where I work now (as a publicity editor in an academic publishing company, on 'flexitime') they're fairly sympathetic about combining jobs and family."

Job flexibility (discussed more fully in the next section) was seen as important by both mother and fathers, but for

different reasons. Men needed flexible jobs in order to be able to take on more of the responsibility for children, but most of the women needed work that could be combined with childcare responsibilities in order to feel able to take paid employment at all.

10.3 Conditions of Employment

Good childcare facilities are obviously an essential step towards providing equal employment opportunities, but many of the parents wanted other changes too. Even if there were enough state or employer-provided nurseries and after-school facilities to enable parents to easily work full-time if they wished, the fact remains that many people want to spend time with their children and resent the either/or choice of economic participation or enjoying their child.

"I want outside interests and work but I also very much enjoy Ellen's company and I think I'd find it very hard to send her out the whole day, every day, to a childminder or whatever, because I'd feel I wasn't seeing enough of her."

(Jane Mitchell)

"When she was very little we didn't really want her to be in a nursery all day. We both started back at university a month after she was born. We were dashing to and fro, it was hectic and very hard going but it was possible because as a student you have incredible autonomy really."

(Mark Bates)

"When they were first born I gave my job up. I think it was quite important for me to get to know them, it stood me in good stead later when I had to go back to work. It must be very

difficult if you don't see much of them at that sort of age. Then we tried to get part-time jobs, so we could both look after them - but the problem was me. Jenny could get any number of part-time jobs, but I couldn't."
(Bob Perkins)

"I feel very strongly that parents should be able to choose to look after their own children, and they should have status and pay for it. Especially for the first two or three years . . . that's partly my own experience. I just enjoyed mine so much and there's so much going on at that time that it's a pity if parents aren't around to enjoy that."
(Sheila Watson)

What most parents saw as necessary was a humanising of the 'masculine' ethos of work to include a recognition of childrearing as socially useful work rather than an intrusion upon employment responsibilities, or a break which hinders a parent's job prospects. More nurseries were seen as necessary, but not enough. As Peter Moss noted in his report for the E.O.C. on childcare provision, 'the extension and improvement of group childcare services must be complemented by changes in employment conditions and practices' (Moss 1978). Institutions needed to change, rather than parents struggle to adopt a different lifestyle within the constraints imposed by external organisations. Roslyn Feldberg and Janet Kohen were describing the difficulty of reforming the marriage relationship within the existing social structure when they wrote the following, but they could equally well have been describing the problems facing non-sexist parents.

"Shared housework and childcare by both sexes would eliminate the strains of the internal,

sex-based division of labour without alleviating the conflict between maintenance and nurturance tasks. The establishment of high quality childcare outside the home would reduce some of the moment-to-moment pressure that results from schedule juggling, but would tie the family to the calendar of yet another organisation. The marriage relationship (read 'non-sexist childrearing') will continue to be difficult, whatever alternatives are invented to improve it, because it cannot be separated or insulated from the pressures exerted by external organisations." (Feldberg and Cohen 1976, 158)

The current conditions of employment which make the combination of childcare and paid employment such a difficult one, may well make role-sharing harder than a straight swap whereby the man stays at home while the woman works, despite the problems of social disapproval and women's limited access to well-paid jobs. Role-changing, as Jan Harper concluded in her study of fifteen Australian full-time fathers, is more compatible with society's existing framework than is the role-sharing which most parents in my study were trying to achieve. (Harper 1979) Most of the parents I interviewed were more interested in finding a satisfactory way of combining work and family roles than in enabling women to participate in the competitive, stressful, 'rat-race' aspects of the 'masculine' work ethos, or men to experience the isolation of fulltime domesticity.

"We need to restructure our whole ideas about work.

Until you get people thinking about work in terms of both their domestic and their paid work you're not going to get it right."
(Sheila Watson)

"I think all parents should be able to choose to work say a six-hour day, or even less perhaps, and not find that restricts their careers.. Its really a change of social attitude that's needed, so its not looked upon as running out on your responsibilities to the job, but as taking time off for your children."
(Jenny Chadwick)

Few employers in this country currently acknowledge that workers have family responsibilities too - those are supposed to be taken care of by the woman staying at home. 'Workplace institutions reward masculine values of competitiveness, aggressiveness, independence and rationality. Workplace rules are designed to be compatible with men's but not women's family responsibilities.'

(Zellman 1976, 34) These rules include a norm of a continuous work life, interrupted only by annual vacations and an occasional sick day; a commitment to 'getting on' by working overtime (the 'clockwork of male careers' described by Arlie Hochschild in 1975), the channelling of a large proportion of emotional as well as physical energy into the job (particularly in professional careers), and working full rather than part-time. Part-time work or shared jobs are either not available or penalised by lower pay and the absence of fringe benefits, as various parents had discovered who tried to work part-time as a means of sharing housework, childcare and paid employment.

"We both stayed at home for six months after they were born, and then we both tried to get part-time jobs. I would have had no difficulty, I could even have gone back to my previous job part-time (a laboratory technician) but Bob came up against a complete wall of opposition. The only part-time jobs for men were for retired people. It was out of the question in printing, a production job. He tried one or two places and they really thought he was very odd even attempting to get a part-time job. So then we made a joint application to the Community Relations Commission for a job as secretary. Both of us can type and do secretarial things, and we've both - especially Bob - got a pretty good record in race relations, and felt we could do the job very competently. We said we wanted the job to share between us, so that one of us worked in the mornings and one in the afternoons and shared the childcare. They wouldn't even consider it."

(Jenny Chadwick)

Kay and Owen Thompson had both held part-time jobs since their children were born, and were reasonably satisfied with the arrangement, but they too had experienced the problems associated with part-time work.

"It's not possible for a part-time teacher to have a scale post. I've set up and run my own small electronics department in the school, and get nothing for it except the kudos. If I were to go back fulltime I'd be on at least a scale 3 post. And I do feel sometimes that I'm overlooked and forgotten about because I'm part-time. I'm not taken into consideration as much as I would be if I was fulltime."

(Owen Thompson)

"I've had to fight for promotion rights as a part-timer. It's not written into the contract now that I can't - but I've not got it yet! So there is a problem with promotion, and also with being taken seriously at the job. You need to keep questioning it when people say you can't do or have things just because you're part-time - why ever not?"

(Kay Thompson)

Creating and controlling one's work was one way of avoiding some of these problems. Sue Macmillen's community functioned as a building co-operative as well as a living group, and provided two days work a week for everyone, including parents. By going outside of the mainstream labour market they had created a different set of norms around which their lives were organised; that everyone in the group should combine childcare, domestic work and paid employment. But for the majority of parents who were employed by some external organisation, the key factor determining their ability to share roles was the degree of flexibility in their job, and the extent to which it allowed them some control over when and how they worked.

In our society, that generally meant academic or academic-related work. Three of the women in my study were in lecturing jobs (at a university or college of further education), one was an academic co-ordinator, two did some freelance writing work at home, and no less than four were students. Three others worked as a supervisor in a children's centre, a publicity editor and an industrial editor. One was a part-time builder, one a part-time physicist, and three had no work outside of the home. Of the fathers, four were lecturers, two secondary school teachers, two freelance writers, one

a scientific researcher in industry and one a medical student who used to be a lecturer. All had work which gave them some control over their working hours. Three other men were in less flexible jobs; a printer, a factory worker and an architect in a large corporation (see table 4.1, p.118). It was clear from the parents' accounts of their attempts to set a non-sexist example by combining childcare and paid work, that they saw the flexibility of their paid job as an important factor determining how far they could share roles (although as I described earlier this flexibility seemed to serve a different function for men and for women, for men being the means by which they could share more of the childcare rather than, as for most of the women, the criterion determining whether or not they were able to work).

"Penny's job (as a lecturer in an F.E. college) is more flexible than mine, but I'm on flexitime so I can take off. Like this morning, the nursery nurse's car broke down and she didn't arrive at the house where the children were being looked after till 11.30. It was my day to take her on my way to work, so I took the morning off."
(Alan Patterson, industrial researcher)

"It's easy for me to take time off, no-one's looking over my shoulder. People at work are very supportive."
(Carl Eichman, lecturer)

"Officially I work set hours, but in practice I can make up time in the evening if I need to. I'd just have a quiet word with one or two people and say look, the kids are ill, can I come in from five this evening instead, and it'd be O.K."
(Kay Thompson, part-time physicist)

"Yesterday Jill had a seminar at 9.30 and I was supposed to be taking both children to the nursery to have their photographs taken. I forgot I was supposed to be chairing a meeting at work at 9.30, so I had to phone up and say 'unspecified domestic crisis, sorry I can't make it, refix meeting for 10.30'. If I'd been in any normal 9-5 job I'd have had it, I'd have been out."

(Steven Harrison, lecturer)

(In some cases, like the incident Steven described, one person's flexibility seemed to be achieved at the expense of others' lack of control over their working hours, like the other people attending the meeting and the secretary who presumably had to work fixed hours in order to be available to re-arrange the schedule.)

"It'd be hard to see how we could do it (try to share childcare) if I had an ordinary manual job and Liz had a traditional woman's job."

(Mark Bates, lecturer)

Only one of the families in my study fell into the category of 'ordinary manual job and traditional woman's job',

(Mick and Lynn Eldridge, factory worker and housewife),

but in two others the men did work fairly inflexible hours

(Bob Perkins, printer, and Jeff Brierley, architect).

In all three families this limited the extent to which the parents could share childcare and domestic work, and in the case of Mick and Jeff, whose wives both stayed at home fulltime, it seemed to be the rationale for a fairly traditional division of labour. Bob Perkins was involved to a large extent in the care of his twin daughters, but he felt that the conservative nature of his trade, printing, prevented him from sharing their care equally with Jenny.

Time off to care for sick children was unthinkable; getting paid sick leave for the workers themselves was a battle that had to be fought through the union. When the firm would not allow him time off to attend the birth of his children, Bob gave up his job and both he and Jenny looked after the twins together for six months, but then lack of money and the difficulty of them both finding part-time work led him to take another printing job, with the same problems for sharing childcare:

"I can't take days off because I don't get paid for them, and I need to do overtime because we need the money. There are periods when I've only seen the children very briefly - I haven't been very happy with that, it's been economic reasons."

(Bob Perkins)

The situation improved when Bob became a trade union official and Jenny began a teacher training course, but they still found it difficult combining two full time jobs and childcare in a society that, despite contemporary myths, is far from 'child-centred'.

"It's very difficult to hold down two full time jobs. You either try and do it and collapse, or you take the attitude that the job is not particularly important and you take time off, but then you either lose it or get passed over for promotion. More and more I think that where you've got two parents - and even more so with single parents - neither should have a full time job. I'm not saying they should only work part-time, but that their work should be reduced in some way, either to school terms or reduced in the length of the day."

(Jenny Chadwick)

Although most of the emphasis in debates about combining childcare and paid employment has been on how employment conditions could be made more flexible in order to allow parents to spend more time with their children at home, it could equally well be argued that instead of excluding children and their caretakers from the work world in an isolated family setting, it would be better to try to break down the work/home division and involve children more in the life of the community. Men who share housework and childcare give children an example of both men and women doing traditionally 'feminine' work, but they are less likely to observe the sharing of traditionally 'masculine' functions. Experts (male) are normally called in to deal with heavy work around the home - building, large-scale car maintenance, plumbing, etc. - and paid work outside the home remains an abstract function, something parents go away to do. Sue MacMillan, who was considering setting up a community bookshop, was aware of the problem:

"With the bookshop I'd be going out for three long days a week, and it'd be fairly invisible to Sam what I was doing, whereas if the mill had happened sooner (renovating a large old cotton mill the group hoped to live in), then I could be doing a lot of things that would be work for me, but which he could be closer to. Working on the land, or with animals or some kind of building work, he could be with me and see me doing them, whereas if I go out to work and it's completely remote he doesn't see me doing it. I think one

of the problems is that children here see men doing the things that women might normally do, but they don't so much see women doing the things that men normally do."
(Sue MacMillan)

10.4 The Nuclear Family

The structural barriers described above which hindered parents in their attempts to alter sex roles arise in part from the organisation of society around the nuclear family - the mechanism by which a traditional division of labour is reproduced. How far is non-traditional sex-role socialisation compatible with raising children within a nuclear family or its variations - or, to phrase the question another way around, how far would a more communal lifestyle enable children to learn less rigid sex roles?

The literature suggests that where there is a commitment to working towards sexual equality, a communal living situation may well make this goal easier to achieve, but that communal living of itself in no way guarantees a less sex-stereotyped environment. Many of the sixties 'back-to-nature' communes, and in particular creedal or religious groups, often resulted in very difficult, oppressive situations for women. As Bernice Eiduson and her colleagues discovered in their longitudinal study of childrearing in alternative families, 'our glib assumption that 'alternative' meant 'women's liberation' was not the case' (Eiduson 1978, 3). Given the commitment,

however, there is usually more potential within a community for re-organising sex roles, largely because the kind of necessary structural supports described above are met by the group rather than by the wider society. Davidson and Gordon, in their discussion of two 19th century communities (Oneida and The Shakers) and one modern one (Twin Oaks in Virginia), have pointed out the common features that enabled them to go a long way towards achieving more equal relationships between men and women, and between adults and children: an emphasis on the individual and the community rather than on couples and nuclear families, job rotation and job sharing, the openness of all jobs and leadership roles to men and women, collective childcare and housework to free both men and women for participation in the community, and an environment that encourages and supports experimentation and change. (Davidson and Gordon 1979, 238)

It seems likely that in such an environment children will stand a good chance of learning less stereotyped ideas. On the one hand, they will see adults behaving in non-traditional ways. One woman I talked to as part of a study of collective childcare in British communities (Statham 1981), felt that this was the case in her group, where childcare and domestic work were done by a 'team'

of four men and women each day on a rota basis:

"I hope Laurel will have a greater chance of realising her potential here because she will have many more adult models to imitate than she would in a regular nuclear family set-up. Here she sees women doing building work, operating the printing press, heaving manure around the garden; she is cared for by men and women and she sees men cooking and cleaning."

And secondly, there are the effects on the developing child's identity of being cared for by more people than their biological parent(s). Ann Ferguson, one of those writers who feels that a 'radical reorganisation of childrearing' is necessary 'in order to eliminate the subordination of women to the patriarchal nuclear family and the perpetuation of sex role stereotypes therein', suggests that as well as fathers and mothers having an equal commitment to raising children, there should also be more community childcare, parent co-operatives and opportunities for communal living. 'A communal responsibility for childrearing would provide children with male and female models other than their biological parent-models that they would be able to see and relate to emotionally' (Ferguson 1977, 65). Diane Ehrensaft, although concerned in her paper with mothers and fathers who were trying to share childcare equally between them, acknowledges that this kind of shared parenting is not the only model for changing society and sex roles, and adds that 'we need to restructure social responsibility

for children so that not just mothers and fathers but also non-family members have access to and responsibility for the care of children'. (Ehrensaft 1981, 45) Nancy Chodorow stresses the importance of multiple parenting (at least two people closely and emotionally involved with the child, and in later versions of her theory at least one of them male) in order to alter the primary identification process with the mother and the reproduction of gender-differentiated character structures. (Chodorow 1978, 1981, 500)

Most of the parents I interviewed had moved away to a greater or lesser extent from the traditional nuclear family pattern. Hardly any had attempted the kind of 'radical reorganisation of childrearing' which authors like Ferguson suggest are necessary to fundamentally alter sex roles, but most were trying to avoid the traditional situation of the mother as caretaker and the father as breadwinner emotionally uninvolved with childcare.

Despite their limitations in practice, most families in principle thought it important for fathers to be equally involved in caring for children, and in several cases non-parents were also very involved, as in Sue Macmillan's community or the O'Brien's shared living situation. The fact that so few non-sexist parents were living in traditional nuclear families (eight consisted of 'husband,

wife and children' but only two of these included the expectation of monogamy and the pattern of male breadwinner/female childcarer), suggests that breaking down this traditional family structure was seen as an integral part of bringing about sex role change. However, the difficulties experienced by parents in trying to arrange their lives differently underlines the role of structural constraints in hindering non-traditional sex role socialisation.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

LIMITS: MALE DOMINANCE

11.0 Introduction

Further difficulties were created for parents wishing to rear children in a non-sexist way, by their living in a society which accords greater power and privilege to men than to women. Radical and psychoanalytically-oriented feminists have argued that this male dominance has far-reaching implications for any attempts to achieve sexual equality. The first section of this chapter uses the psychoanalytic perspectives developed by feminists like Nancy Chodorow as a framework for understanding some of the difficulties parents experienced in trying to alter such aspects of sex roles as women's function as primary caretakers of children. It is suggested that the economic analysis presented in the previous chapter to explain the continuance of women's mothering does not adequately come to terms with the strength of unconscious mental processes which can make change in adult life very difficult. The second section demonstrates how the internalisation of the second class status of women in our society could further hinder attempts at sex role change, and the third section illustrates how this imbalance of power was seen by the parents in this study to create particular difficulties for rearing sons in a less sex-

stereotyped way. The final section of the chapter takes up the questions these issues raise about the relationship between personal and political change, and analyses how far the parents saw their non-sexist childrearing policy within the context of broader feminist and/or socialist political activity.

11.1 The Reproduction of Mothering

In its early stages the Women's Liberation Movement concerned itself with documenting and criticising inequalities between the sexes, but more recently feminists have developed both structural and psychological analyses which attempt to explain the roots of women's oppression and the continuance of traditional sex roles. For some, the kind of economic factors presented in the previous chapter provide an adequate explanation for such phenomena as women's continued role as primary caretakers of children, without the need for any psychological interpretation.

"If you want to change the kind of men and women you produce, do not change the parenting arrangement, change the social structure that produces the parenting arrangement. Do not worry about men's psychological capacities for parenting, but give women and men a chance to earn equal incomes so that it will be as costly for women to be fulltime parents as it is now for men. Then, I predict, parenting will be shared - and not just by biological parents, but by communities of interested adults."

(Judith Lorber 1981, 486)

For others like Chodorow, structural factors, though important, are inadequate as a total explanation of why women often want to mother, above and beyond the effects of economic discrimination. "Parenting is not just a punishment for women because they earn less . . . this is not to argue that all women want to mother or should want to, but that mothering now is not mainly an enforced activity." (Chodorow 1981, 503)

"I'd always wanted to have a child, I don't know why. I knew exactly what it would be like because being the eldest of six I'd had to spend an awful lot of time looking after them, and knew what it involved and that it was horrific . . . I really don't know why. I don't think it's maternal instincts - it just felt ingrained in me that I had to have a child."

(Rosemary Simpson, daughter 6)

Chodorow argues that there can be a negative side to the sensitivity and empathy which are developed in women by their experience of being mothered themselves by women; a sense of being responsible for everything that goes wrong, an inability to 'switch off', a danger of being over-involved and suffocating in their relationships with children (especially daughters), who are unable to find the freedom to develop a sense of themselves as separate, autonomous individuals. For men, the other side of their ability to be more detached and sure of their own boundaries, is often a difficulty in relating closely and sensitively to others. These psychological barriers

to shared parenting were mentioned by several of the parents I interviewed. Men would sometimes describe how they found it difficult to share the emotional, sensitive side of childcare, even though they wanted to, and several women talked about how hard they found it to 'switch off' from their responsibilities, and be able to give their energy and attention to other things.

"I find it hard cuddling Josh. There was hardly any physical contact in my family at all, so it doesn't come easily to me."
(Mike Underwood, boy 8)

When Josh was eleven:

"I think perhaps he sees me in the way that I saw my father, as a sort of vaguely distant figure who's accessible at times of need rather than someone who's constantly accessible on an emotional level. It's not something that I want, but its the way I am."
(Mike Underwood)

"I'm much more sensitive to other people's needs than Alan is, and that keeps interfering - he's much better at being single-minded, he can concentrate and cut himself off completely. I think most men can do that. If they've got something they've got to do they just do it, it doesn't matter what's going on around them, and I'm always aware that maybe Kathryn's going to need me, or somebody's got to wash the dishes."
(Penny Griffiths)

"I resent Steve's psychological and emotional freedom to be able to go away and do things and not be encumbered by feelings of what he ought to be doing. I find it much harder to spend a night away from my children, say to go to London for a couple of days to do research. Even if I

need to go and there's no reason why I shouldn't go in terms of the welfare of my children, I still find it hard . . . Steve says why don't you, you can go away anytime, but I can't . . . its very complicated."
(Jill Harrison)

When analysing the parents' division of labour, it became obvious that although fathers reported participating far more in both housework and childcare than would be expected from the representation of the contemporary father in the literature, their participation was nevertheless not equal to that of the women, and it was in the area of responsibility for these tasks that the inequality was most pronounced.

Diane Ehrensaft, in a paper called 'When Women and Men Mother', distinguishes between what she calls the physical and the psychic division of labour in parenting. She asks "who carries around in their heads knowledge of nappies needing to be laundered, finger nails needing to be cut, new clothes needing to be bought?" and concludes that "it is probable that men carry less of the mental baggage of parenting, regardless of mutual agreements to share the responsibility of parenting". (Ehrensaft 1981, 32).

This conclusion was echoed in my study. It was women who tended to remember dates and events; when the child was potty-trained, how long various lodgers or child-carers had stayed, exactly what the early childcare arrangements had been. This is hardly surprising given

that in most families, despite 'mutual agreements to share the responsibility of parenting', this responsibility for childcare arrangements seemed to fall on mothers.

"I've mainly been the one who's found the childcare arrangements. Partly because I could do it during the day and Bob couldn't . . . but I don't think that was fully it. I think he feels that people don't take him seriously. He finds it difficult even to ring up and get a babysitter. Our babysitting circle only put the woman's name on the list, so he has to go through this long rigmarole when he rings up, 'I'm Bob Perkins and I live with Jenny Chadwick and I want a babysitter' and people sort of freak out . . ."

(Jenny Chadwick)

Two-and-a-half years later:

"Childcare arrangements always have been and still are my responsibility. In the past year or so its become even more my responsibility, (a) to find a childminder, (b) to take them to school or childminder and (c) to pick them up."

(Jenny Chadwick)

"Last weekend we both had very important work deadlines. Carl worked in his office all weekend, and I wrote my papers at home with Norman all weekend. I could have arranged for childcare if I really couldn't cope, but I'd have had to do that, even though Carl usually has Norman for four or five hours each Saturday and Sunday."

(Sarah Eichmann)

(Carl revealed his perception of who was really responsible for the baby in his description of his weekend activities with Norman. "I'll take him off for a jaunt to give Sarah a break.")

"The childcare devolves more on Jill. And the swapping arrangements after school, who goes back where, is definitely organised by the wives - so are the swapping arrangements in the holidays."
(Steven Harrison)

Even Kay Thompson, who described her and Owen's division of housework and childcare as 'boringly democratic', felt that they had not managed to break down this particular aspect of the work:

"I feel very much as though I have the responsibility of remembering what needs to be done and making sure it gets done. I suppose it does make up for the car maintenance!"

This responsibility extended to making sure that childcare was 'shared' between the parents.

"I feel this has been an issue all along, in terms of domestic arrangements and now with the baby, that its my responsibility. Part of that responsibility is saying 'you'll have him then' or 'who's doing the washing?' Its not that I do everything, its that I have to figure out who's doing what. I always feel its me who's doing the negotiating, because if I didn't I'd be landed with everything."
(Sarah Eichmann)

Although this sense of responsibility often remained with women in the area of household chores too, on the whole parents seemed to have managed a more equitable division of labour for housework than for childcare. Psychoanalytically-oriented feminists would explain this phenomenon in terms of the early identification experiences of girls, which provide them with the kind of personality characteristics that enable them to 'mother' in a way that the

early socialisation of boys does not. Mothering has been defined as being able to "provide frequent and sustained physical contact, soothe the child when distressed, be sensitive to the baby's signals and respond to a baby's crying promptly," and the argument is that women are not biologically better equipped to mother but that "years in female-dominated parenting situations and in gender-differentiated cultural institutions can do differentially prepare boys and girls for the task of 'mothering'."

(Ehrensaft 1981, 27)

The 'task of mothering' thus requires the development of certain ways of relating to others which are presumably harder to learn than are the practical skills necessary for housework. Many of the men in my study had lived on their own for a while and could look after themselves, but they did not have the same preparation for parenting. That is not to say that childhood socialisation had no effect on the parents' ability to share household tasks; women often reported being unable or uninterested in doing repair or mechanical work because of their lack of experience in such areas, and men might fail to take on a fair share of the housework simply from not noticing what needs to be done, from having different attitudes to what needs to be done, or from not having developed the ability to concentrate on several tasks at the same time:

"There are certain things that Andrew does, and certain things that I do, and what's left I do - or that's the way I feel! I've finally come to the conclusion that somebody who's not been socialised to see the dust and dirt or things dropped on the floor will never see it. He just genuinely doesn't see it, I mean if he sees it he'll do something about it . . .

"He's good at specifics, but he's never been able to perceive what needs to be done in the same way as I do - tidying up, the 'invisible' work. Nor is he good at fragmenting his thinking and action so as to be able to do a number of things at once."

(Susan Durrant)

But it was definitely in the area of childcare that the difference between men's and women's participation was most noticeable, and it is on this area that psychoanalysts have concentrated in their attempt to explain some of the more deeply-rooted difficulties facing parents trying to alter traditional sex roles.

Radical feminists have provided an alternative explanation: men don't do childcare because they don't want to.

"Men (as a group) don't rear children because they don't want to rear children. It is to men's advantage that women are assigned child-rearing responsibility, and it is in men's interest to keep things that way."

(Polatnik 1974, 60)

Certainly the greater responsibility that even 'non-sexist' mothers felt for childcare reflects the fact that fathering, for men, is a choice in a way that mothering is not. Fathering is something men can choose to do, being a

mother is something that women are. Women cannot 'opt out' of childcare in the way that men feel able to. It is unlikely that Jill Harrison would have felt able to 'demand more time' in the way that Steven described doing:

"We shared looking after the children one week on and one week off during the nursery school holidays, but then I started writing a book so I demanded more time and Jill was unemployed so she did most of it."

(Steven Harrison)

However being less able to 'opt out' of childcare, while undoubtedly true, did not seem to be the whole story. Some women were honest enough to admit that truly equal parenting was complicated by the fact that they did not always want men to be as involved with and important to the children as they were themselves. Sarah Eichmann had always wanted to share childcare and for the baby to be equally close to its father, but after Norman was born she described how this was more difficult than she had imagined (the problem was complicated in her case by the fact that when she was pregnant she and Carl had been living apart and Sarah was contemplating bringing up the child alone, "so it was quite hard to swap into a complete sharing thing"). Part of the problem was the 'expertise gap' which they felt was created by Sarah spending the first week with Norman in hospital, learning how to care for him ("so from day one the mother knows and the father doesn't and has to be shown"), part of it was the fact

that the baby was breastfed and Carl felt that restricted the extent to which he could be involved, but a further reason was Sarah's own feelings of the baby being somehow 'hers', and of not wanting to share that.

"I like him being happy with other people, but if I'm completely honest I do feel a bit jealous, and its almost like Carl's one of them. Norman is my baby, and then lots of other people take care of him and enjoy him. I never worry when he's off with Carl, it's not a question of competency, and its not even a question of my assumptions about the baby's affections towards me, because I genuinely want him to like and feel comfortable with other people. Its much more my feelings towards him. Its a type of intense love that I never predicted."
(Sarah Eichmann)

In a society where mothering is one of the few acceptable sources of power for women, it is not surprising that they may experience difficulties in sharing that, especially if the activities which fathers take on are the more enjoyable, satisfying ones while they are left with the tedious routine jobs, the servicing work and the 'mental baggage' of parenting, and if the rewards women receive in entering the labour market are not equal to those of men. In Diana Ehrensaft's words, "the sharing mother may feel the need to reclaim the 'primary parent' role in the family in order to establish control and autonomy somewhere". (Ehrensaft 1981)

11.2 Women Second

Another obstacle to equality described by several women

was the difficulty experienced in putting themselves first, and considering their needs before - or as well as - those of their partner and children. This theme often emerged from their discussions of how and when they and their partners moved house or took on various jobs. In 'Wedlocked Women', Lee Comer notes how women in 'dual-career' families still tend to put the man's career first despite earning an equivalent salary, and comments that 'when the economic necessity is removed, the psychological barrier remains.' She goes on to say that 'a state of affairs in which the sex roles were reversed, where men willingly uprooted themselves, leaving their work, their friends and their social life in order to trail after the woman because she found a better job in another town and where he would live in social isolation, is inconceivable'. (Comer 1974, 60)

It was not inconceivable to the parents I interviewed, but it had rarely happened. Janet O'Brien said her husband Tony had spent a year in Scandinavia with her when she was offered research work there before their children were born, but this was not a common experience for the men. Several of the women, on the other hand, did describe spending a year or more abroad when their partner's job demanded it.

"We went to France for a year, because of John.
I wasn't unwilling because I wanted a year away too,

but I was apprehensive about the fact that I hadn't got anything to go to and in fact that turned out to be quite valid, I was rather miserable for most of the time because I hadn't got anything."
(Patricia Noble)

"Andrew wanted to go back to do some more fieldwork abroad and wanted me to go too, and I felt very ambivalent because I didn't know anything about that area of the world, I felt very pushed into it. In fact I went resenting it very bitterly, although I didn't realise that till I got there, that it was his area where he spoke the language and I didn't and I'd only gone because of him."
(Susan Durrant)

Steven Harrison was quite open about the greater importance attached to his job:

"Without a doubt, we both agree that I'm the careerist in the family. Jill should always have a job, a stimulating and good job, but the predominant expectation is that it's my career that comes first. We've never had to face the problem, but we have already said that if I get a job somewhere else that interested me, then we'll go." (Which they did, two years later.)

This view was more extreme than that of most parents.

Very few acknowledged that the man's career should take precedence over the woman's; what most said was that they took both their needs and preferences equally into account when deciding on a move or a change of job.

"We married when we were students and lived in a flat in Liverpool. Then we both wanted to move to London, and Anna got a job there first so she moved first and I followed. She changed her job there several times, then we reached a point where we both wanted to leave London, and

we both managed to get fulltime jobs as architects with the same county."
(Jeff Brierley)

Now that they had children, however, Jeff's job was the determining factor in where they lived, although Anna said she "wouldn't move with his job if it was somewhere I really didn't want to go".

"Penny got a job in Manchester and I got one in Stoke. We couldn't find anywhere in-between to live so we lived in Stoke for nine months because something came up there, and then a flat came up in Manchester so we moved there and I commuted for another year till I got a job here too. There's never been any argument about who should live nearest to their work."
(Alan Patterson)

However what often seemed to be the case was that women felt unable to put their own needs first, especially if that meant inconveniencing others.

"I thought about becoming a tax inspector, but they expected you to be very mobile and to just go where they sent you and your family had to follow. I just wasn't willing to make John do that, or to spend a year away from home."
(Patricia Noble)

"I know I still have problems with my own attitudes. I haven't really got right down to the basis of my conditioning . . . for instance, I've got another year of my degree to go, and if after that time I particularly wanted to go somewhere else, for career reasons, I think I'd find that more difficult than a man would in the same position."
(Jenny Chadwick)

11.3 Male Privilege: Tomboys versus Sissies

Although Jenny Chadwick described the problem as 'my

own attitudes', it appeared that many of the difficulties parents faced in attempting to behave in non-stereotyped ways, and many of the limits they placed on non-sexist childrearing for boys, were due to the unequal value attached to being male or female in our society. Being born male carries greater power and privileges than does being born female, despite the limits and pressures which sex role stereotyping undeniably imposes on male as well as female development. 'Opening up options' thus has a different meaning for boys and girls, and while parents may espouse the same ideal for sons and daughters, the inferior value society attaches to the 'feminine' options makes it likely that working towards this ideal in practice will involve different experiences for parents of sons than of daughters. In this study, the greater reticence about non-sexist childrearing for boys was reflected not only in the attitudes and behaviour of the parents I spoke to, but also in the fact that it was far more difficult to recruit families containing boys to participate in the study. It was much easier to find parents of girls who fitted the criterion of trying to challenge traditional notions of femininity than it was to find parents of boys who did not want them to be traditionally 'masculine'. Of the original twentyfour children in the study, seventeen were girls, and in order to obtain some insight into what a less stereotyped

upbringing might involve for boys, I had to search out more parents who had sons.

The great majority of parents included in the study, both those with sons and those with daughters, thought that it was not equally easy (or difficult) to bring up boys and girls in a non-sexist way. They believed it was important that the male role be changed too, but they envisaged more difficulties in attempting to do so.

"We feel its easier with girls, you're just trying to open up things for them and not stop them. Its much more difficult with boys. I don't know how I'd have coped with boys. You'd have to make more of a conscious effort to have given them a doll or dolls' pram or whatever, and then to have defended them against the ridicule which they might get from other children. In terms of clothes its also easier having girls, because you can dress them in jeans and trousers and yet still allow them to wear dresses and ribbons and things if they want to. But I don't think I could have allowed a boy to go out with a ribbon in his hair, or wearing a dress. I think I would have felt it would be too much for him to cope with. Somehow its more acceptable for a little girl to be a tomboy and always has been, than for a boy to be a sissy. The side of it I'd find easier to accept would be that a boy needs cuddles and needs to cry and be soft and get upset, than to see him with a ribbon in his hair!"

(Jenny Chadwick, twin daughters 3)

The reasons parents gave for it being more difficult with sons generally reflected an awareness of the unequal balance of power between men and women in a male-dominated society. When men as a whole are in a privileged position, girls (and women) were seen as

gaining more power from expanding sex roles, whereas boys (and men) were seen as having to give up some of their power and privileges in order to achieve equality. Few parents would want to feel that they were holding their own child back, even if they accept that boys as a group should not have all the advantages.

"It is easier for us, because we just have to stress the positive things, opening up choices, etc. Although you would do that with boys too, you'd obviously open up the so-called 'feminine' roles and values to them, I think you'd also have to suppress a bit of their macho tendencies, wouldn't you? And that would be harder, though just as important - its easier for us because we don't have to be negative."

(Jenny Chadwick, twin girls 6)

"It's easier to make girls see the advantage of a non-sexist upbringing in the sense that they've got more to gain from it. Boys do have very real things to lose, their house-keeper and status and power. I can see that there's a very real attraction for boys in joining a dominant group, and that therefore it may be fairly difficult to convince them its to their advantage to be non-sexist."

(Janet O'Brien, daughter 2)

"I'd find it hard with a boy, because most of the influences in our society seem to be trying to hold back girls and encourage boys. You can compensate the girl by helping her forward in certain areas, whereas with a boy you'd almost feel you had to hold him back from certain activities, or at least try to redirect him into others. That's the problem, I wouldn't like to feel I was holding him back from something, yet if you just let him develop in an uncontrolled fashion he'd head towards a traditional male role."

(Alan Patterson, daughter 3)

All of the parents just quoted had daughters rather than sons. Those with boy children were less pessimistic about the possibilities of non-sexist childrearing (perhaps those who were had already given up), although they too foresaw problems with getting boys to see the advantages of the way they were being brought up.

"What males are being asked to do is to give up a certain element of their hegemony. Granted they may be gaining other things, but from the average male point of view its a great sacrifice. One has to make a very good case for why they should give up being number one, what's in it for me? Its very difficult to say, well you'll liberate a whole aspect of society. You do have to impose restrictions in a practical sense, teach them that they can't go on thinking its all for them, that they don't have to share whatever's around with their sister or sisters in a wider sense. Its bringing up a child to recognise that it can't ask for the world."

(Andrew Durrant, daughter 8, son 7)

Sue MacMillan described how altering stereotyped images in children's books involved expecting her son to renounce some of the traditional male privileges.

"I'll change some of the males in stories to females because I don't want him to go through life thinking its all about what men and boys do."

(Sue Macmillan, son 1½)

Although boys were seen to gain from being brought up in a less stereotyped way, these gains were less public and obvious than those for girls. Girls gained access to the public world, whereas with boys it seemed to be more a question of opening up the private world of home, family and feelings.

"I want him to be sensitive and warm and in touch with things to do with the earth and people and relationships. I'd want to encourage him to be non-aggressive and happy and loving."

(Sue MacMillan, son 1½)

"I tend to see what you'd do with a boy as making him more able to accept the feminine in himself and believe in it and not suppress it. I tend not to see it as opening up many more options in society for a boy, by being more feminine."

(John Noble, daughters 7 and 5)

It appeared easier to teach girls that they should feel no jobs or opportunities are closed to them because of their sex, than it was to teach boys that they should feel able to show their feelings, be gentle and sensitive and aware. The former requires encouragement, guidance, pointing out the practical possibilities - as one mother put it, "what she can do with is being cheered on all the time, letting her know that we think she's great whatever she wants to do" - whereas the latter involves changes in relationships, so that boys are more able to empathise, sympathise and co-operate, which must depend to a large extent on the way the parents relate to each other and to him, rather than on what they say and overtly teach. The goals seemed more tangible in the case of girls, and parents seemed much surer of what they were doing with daughters. Mothers in particular felt that their daughters could identify with them and their ideas and struggles, that

they could 'show them the way' in a manner that was less possible with their sons.

"I know that I see my son as in some respects foreign to me. I can't identify with him in the way I presumably would with a daughter. I can't relate to his experience."
(Jeanne Rosen, son 8)

Not all of the parents felt that it was more difficult to bring up a boy than a girl in a less sexist way, although those who disagreed were certainly in the minority. One mother with a four-year-old son and 1½-year-old daughter saw it the other way around, for various reasons.

"I see my main problem as being raising the daughter rather than raising the son, because mostly it seems to me that the male stereotype, in its middle-class form anyhow, isn't so terribly offensive. With a boy you've got less to counteract. There are certain things, the machismo, aggressive, anti-feminist bit, but most of the qualities that are thought to be quite good in boys, the adventuresomeness and independence and self confidence, are qualities I'd want to develop anyhow, and its much harder if there's counter pressure not to develop them. If you've got pressure being directed at girls to behave in a feminine way, then its much more difficult to counteract."
(Jill Harrison, son 4, daughter 1½)

Most of the parents would have agreed with her about wanting to develop qualities like adventuresomeness and independence and self-confidence in children of both sexes, but for this very reason they often felt it was more difficult with a boy child, because of having to get the balance right. With girls they

felt they could wholeheartedly encourage such characteristics, which have not been part of the traditional female stereotype, whereas with boys they felt they wanted to encourage similar qualities but also had to prevent them going to excess. They felt the need to 'draw the line' somewhere to prevent assertiveness developing to a 'masculine' extreme of aggression, power over oneself from becoming power over others, self-confidence from tipping over into arrogance, independence into emotional sterility.

"At the moment, when it doesn't seem to have any bad results, all my inclinations are to encourage him to be adventurous and strong and curious and really going into things. That's the whole way a baby is. I can do that fairly wholeheartedly at the moment. But I'm aware I've got dilemmas. The bad side of that could come out so easily, he could be adventurous and go around knocking people over. I'd find it easier to encourage a girl wholeheartedly. I could identify with her, and I think I'd be less quick to worry about her behaviour going too far because I'd think, well at least she'll be able to hold her own against the boys!"

(Sue MacMillan, son 1½)

Living in a society that values males above females, and 'successful' males above less competitive ones, parents felt they would need to counter the tendency for boys to think of themselves as superior whilst still helping them to develop self-confidence and an appreciation of their own abilities.

"A lot of the little boys I know are very into being male and rough, strong and the best and fastest and toughest, and I think I'd find that very difficult. Whereas with her I find it fairly easy to encourage her to be independent and to do things."

(Rosemary Simpson, daughter 6)

The growth of the Women's Movement has challenged women's second-class citizenship and validated the desire to encourage girls to "be independent and to do things".

Sex role change for women has a context and support network which is lacking for changes in the male sex role. Sheila Watson illustrated the importance of this support network in her feelings about how possible non-sexist childrearing was two-and-a-half years after her original interview.

Then, her work as a student had left her little time to get involved in much social or political activity and she felt relatively isolated in her ideas, whereas by the time of the second interview she had finished her course and become involved in issues to do with women and education.

"While I was doing my degree I felt that was the priority, and I didn't have time to get involved in much else. But then I got on a postgraduate course and had a feminist tutor, and that was a marvellous feeling of support, the sense that somebody else was fighting the same battle. I started a group for women teachers, and it made me realise you can do a lot more as a group, you can change things . . . and I think that's around in the atmosphere and that Joanna will pick it up, the sense that we can do somethings."

(Sheila Watson)

Sheila felt that bringing up sons would be far harder because of the lack of such a framework within which to operate.

"I think it must be much easier with a girl, because we know about feminism and the way women are oppressed, but we're only just beginning to realise the ways men are oppressed and aren't allowed to do things they'd like to do. So there are far more women about who are aware of these things and can be models for little girls, whereas there aren't yet any models for little boys."
(Sheila Watson)

There is as yet no comparable men's movement to provide support for changes in the male sex role, and although the Women's Movement has recently begun to debate the "problem of boy children" (e.g. Hamblin 1980, Spare Rib 1980), there is a good deal of controversy over the possibility or even the advisability of women trying to change men's sex role behaviour and attitudes. On the one hand, some radical feminists have asserted that such attempts 'waste energy' that should be reserved for women.

"At present, any caring and nurturing done to men (of any age) is propping up male supremacy. I'd prefer it if women who look after boys realise what they are doing. This doesn't mean that I won't support women who are looking after boys, for example by offering childcare, and it certainly doesn't mean that I hate any woman because she puts energy into her son. But I would still prefer all our energy to go into women, because we won't have a feminist revolution until we put women first."
(Edinburgh Conference on lesbian and feminist childrearing, 1981)

On the other hand, some socialist feminists have argued that the male sex role will only change when the economic structure is altered, and that individual attempts to bring up sons in a less sexist way therefore 'waste energy'

that should go into a socialist revolution.

"I don't want the burden of responsibility of proving that I can bring up two non-sexist, anti-capitalist boys. That attempt could too easily become an intensification of a traditional mother's role. I rebel as much against the time and energy it would take as a mother to try and go against the tide as I do against the traditional roles of a mother . . . The lure of patriarchy is not something we can exclude or do battle with for the soul of an individual child . . . my goal in relation to my children is not to make them into non-sexist men, but to make a society which will make it impossible for them or any other boys to become sexist."

(Spare Rib 1980)

There is thus much less support for the non-traditional sex role socialisation of male children both from within as well as from outside of the Women's Movement. Bringing up boys in a less sexist way within a male-dominated society involves more contradictions than does the same policy for girls, and it was clear that this set definite limits on the parents' ideas about non-sexist childrearing for boys. Sons were seen to benefit by being allowed to develop the 'feminine' aspects of their personality and to be freed from the pressure to always be strong, tough and successful, but they were also seen to need to renounce their traditional male power and privileges. Whilst parents might well view this equalising of power as a desirable goal for society at large, it could conflict with their desires for their own child. One of the issues which thus emerged from an analysis of the difficulties and limits parents experienced in trying to bring up children - especially boys - in a less stere-

otyped way, was the relationship between individual and social change. In the final section of this chapter, I shall illustrate how the parents in this study viewed their non-sexist childrearing policies within the context of broader social and political change.

11.4 Personal and Political Change

Although their commitment to non-sexist childrearing obviously meant that the parents in this study were concerned with changing attitudes and behaviour at an individual level, for most parents this personal focus did not preclude a belief in the necessity for changes at a structural level too. Most had obviously given a good deal of thought to the kind of changes which they felt would make it more possible to bring up a child in a less sex-stereotyped way.

"Tremendous provision of childcare facilities and back-up services, which are being reduced rather than increased." (Bob Perkins)

"Parenthood leave." (Tony O'Brien)

"Institutionalised care for kids after school, clubs, and so on, a better system of child-minders, nurseries at work and that kind of thing - and also a caretaker's allowance so parents can look after their own children if they want." (Sheila Watson)

"Labour market flexibility" (Steven Harrison)

"Paternity leave, changes in social security benefits, flexitime." (Jeanne Rosen)

"An economic climate which doesn't look at women as fodder for the labour market." (Andrew Durrant)

"Things like more daycare, better abortion facilities, more flexible attitudes towards jobs and towards working part-time, a shorter working day for parents, paid sick leave to look after children, and provision after school and in the school holidays." (Jenny Chadwick)

Their desire to work for changes in society as well as within their own family was expressed in two forms, involvement in socialist politics and involvement in the Women's Movement - and often both. Jenny Chadwick and Bob Perkins were both very active in the Labour party, campaigning for the kind of changes in employment conditions that they saw as a necessary prerequisite for sexual equality. Kay Thompson had until the previous year been secretary and chairperson of her local Labour party, while Owen Thompson had been a district councillor. Susan and Andrew Durrant both saw their involvement in left-wing politics as an important part of their lives, connected to working for sexual equality. Penny Griffiths was "into socialist politics before I was a feminist, that came first", and her husband Alan Patterson described himself as a strong trade unionist, although he was sceptical of the union's support for sex role issues. "The very nature of most present trade union activity is almost designed to prevent any attempt to bring personal roles into it."

Although there was considerable variation in their degree of political involvement and commitment, all of the parents

in the study were sympathetic to left-wing or at least liberal views. They usually supported racial and class as well as sexual equality.

"There are all sorts of different oppressions going on in society, people being mistreated on the basis of all sorts of things - being young, or working class, or black or female. They all interact, and the mistake that most of the liberation movements seem to make is to assume that you can get it right for women without also getting it right for all the other groups who are mistreated - particularly the interaction of sexism and working class oppression."

(Kay Thompson)

For the majority of the women in the study, the Women's Liberation Movement provided another avenue for working towards sexual equality, and a means of linking the changes they were making in their own and their children's lives to wider social change. Feminism was less important to the men in the study, although none were openly antagonistic to feminist ideals, and several parents commented that non-sexist childrearing would be impossible if both partners did not agree on the issues to a large extent. However, very few men had any contact with a men's group or much sense of being supported in non-traditional behaviour by their male peers, whereas for the women their identification with the Women's Liberation Movement appeared to be an important element in attempting to change sex roles. They varied in the degree of their involvement, from those who belonged to various groups

and whose research or teaching work was in the area of Women's Studies to those who agreed with the principles but were not actively involved at the time, but with one exception all the women considered themselves to be feminists and saw supporting the Women's Movement as an integral part of non-sexist childrearing. The exception was Lynn Eldridge, whose husband worked in a factory and who described herself as a 'full-time mum' with 'lots of other interests' such as gardening, sewing, design work and helping at the playgroup. She agreed with equality of opportunity, but was equivocal in her support of the Women's Movement, and disapproving of a sister-in-law who refused to wash up and called herself 'Ms'. After discussion of their interests and involvements in groups, I asked her if she had ever been involved in the Women's Movement at any time.

Lynn Difficult to say. (To Mick) Have I?

Mick There was the Young Wives . . .

Lynn She doesn't mean that, she means the bra-burning thing.

To me: No, I haven't. But I've always assumed that women should be equal. I think we're different but equal, its as simple as that.

Lynn and Mick Eldridge joined the study through answering a request in a national newspaper for 'parents who have deliberately tried to show their children alternatives to traditional sex roles', and they fulfilled the criterion

of considering themselves to be consciously trying to bring up their children in a less sex-stereotyped way. However, they formed what ethnographers term a 'deviant case' for analysis in several respect. Unlike other non-sexist parents in the study, they saw non-sexist child-rearing as mainly a question of controlling their children's environment, and they talked in terms of trying to provide similar toys and experiences for their son aged six and daughter aged four.

"We have a policy of treating them exactly the same as far as possible. We don't go as far as dressing them the same, but if we buy them toys we'll buy them both the same matchbox toy, and we encourage them to share all their toys, the dolls' house and cars and everything."
(Lynn Eldridge)

Lynn, however, did most of the housework and had increasingly taken on most of the childcare, although Mick had been more involved when the children were younger and she had suffered what she described as 'the baby blues'. Both appeared happy with her opinion that "with this next baby, if I manage to produce one, he won't lift a finger, he knows I can cope now". Lynn and Mick differed from the rest of the parents in the study in adopting a fairly authoritarian stance with their children, and feeling that children need "a firm hand - we find they're happier that way". During the interview the children loitered on the stairs on their way up to bed and were soundly

reprimanded by Lynn, who sent Mick to hurry them by 'giving them a tanning'.

"They do get smacked. I don't believe there's any point in beating them senseless, you don't get anywhere, but a hearty smack on the bottom or the hand brings them to their senses."
(Lynn Eldridge)

It was when Lynn talked about their reasons for taking part in the research that it underlined the importance to most parents in the study of forming a non-authoritarian relationship with their child, and the significance of this in their conception of non-sexist childrearing. Lynn and Mick had got in touch because they felt that parents should have the right to bring up children as they saw best. The experience of being visited by an N.S.P.C.C. official when their daughter was nine months old, to investigate an anonymous - and unfounded - report that they were neglecting her, had left them both feeling very bitter and antagonistic towards any interference by society in their role as parents.

"I think your freedom of choice as an individual is undermined by society. You should have the right to bring your kids up as you like. If you want to dress your daughters up as little flimsies from the age of birth onwards you're entitled to. Its hard though when you want to bring them up as caring individuals, and the matter of their sex is incidental. To have society fiddling with this is depressing . . . That is one of the main reasons why I wrote. I feel so strongly about the right to do what you think best, within reason obviously, but you don't want people to barge in too much."
(Lynn Eldridge)

For Lynn and Mick, non-sexist childrearing was seen within the context of parents having authority over their own children and of strengthening the traditional family.

For other parents in the study, challenging this authority and family structure was an essential part of non-sexist childrearing, and was reflected in their involvement with and support for the Women's Liberation Movement.

The Women's Movement has emphasised the importance of changes in the way individuals live their own lives, and has linked this to more widespread social change through the slogan of 'the personal is political'. The concern of non-sexist parents with the upbringing of their own children can thus be seen as a political as well as a personal choice. Although they varied in the relative importance they attached to individual as opposed to social change, most parents in this study saw the two as closely connected.

"I hope that by changing their attitudes and by other families changing the attitudes of their children, that in turn will change the structures also. I think it has to be a two-pronged attack, structural change and attitude change."

(Jenny Chadwick)

"I think change needs to happen on all sorts of levels, the structure of society, the media, and I suppose even just people like us, the more of us there are the better and the more 'normal' our kids appear to be despite their abnormal ideas."

(Penny Griffiths)

"Ultimately and ideally I think one has to change the whole structure, change everything - the economic system. But to be realistic I don't see that happening in the near future, so in a sense you have to put the cart before the horse, which is to create ideologies to try and change people's attitudes and minds, which is not really where the attack has to come. It has to come at the basic infrastructure of society, which is the economic system. Then that makes the ideological changes you want much easier to accomplish. But at the moment you have to do it the other way around."

(Andrew Durrant)

"What you can do is to not take away from children the power to change things for themselves. Okay, work on changing society as well - but I think part of changing society is modelling and doing things differently."

(Kay Thompson)

11.5 Summary

In this chapter I have drawn together some of the themes connected with power, privilege and underlying personality structures which often made it difficult for parents to engage in non-stereotyped behaviour even when they consciously wanted to do so, and which in particular led them to perceive more obstacles in the way of bringing up sons than daughters with non-sexist values. Their difficulties reflect the fact that the childrearing practices of individual families cannot be seen in isolation from the nature of the society in which those families operate. The economic and educational constraints discussed in the previous chapters and the basic sexual

inequality in terms of power presented here affected the parents' behaviour in both direct and subtle ways.

CHAPTER 12FOUR CASE STUDIES12.0 Introduction

The four case studies presented in this chapter are based on several further visits to the families concerned, on a second interview two and a half to three years after the first, and on time spent talking with the children and observing them informally with their parents.

Although the perceptions of the children were not the focus of the research, data obtained from the children in these four families are included in the case studies to illustrate the nature of the interaction between parent and child. The case studies are intended to provide a more detailed picture of what non-sexist childrearing can mean in practice, and to give a feel for the personalities and relationships of the people involved which it is difficult to provide through the use of isolated quotations. They were selected less as typical non-sexist families, but rather because they illustrate some of the themes and concepts which emerged during the course of the study. The longitudinal element threw several of these issues into sharper focus. Many of the themes were strengthened by considering how the parents had dealt with the changes that had occurred over a three-year period, such as their children starting primary or secondary schooling or approaching puberty,

or their own economic circumstances significantly altering.

The adults in these four families lived in a variety of different ways. One woman was a single parent, another lived with her son and her lover, one couple was married and the other couple was deliberately unwed. Their financial situations varied from comfortably off to struggling, although all could be broadly described as middle class, and in each family at least one partner did work of an academic nature, either as a student, a lecturer or a teacher. This reflected the bias in my sample as a whole. They varied too in the priority they attached to non-sexist childrearing, and in their perception of its relationship to their other interests and ideals. Some saw it very much within the context of a broader political ideology and stressed the importance of widespread structural as well as personal change. Others adopted a more individualistic, psychological perspective, and still others emphasised feminist rather than socialist politics.

The four families were divided between those which contained young children (3½-year-old twin girls in one, just 6 by the final visit; and a 2-year-old girl in the other who was 5 with a 2-year-old sister by the time of the second interview), and those containing an older child - a boy of 8, just eleven by the final visit, and

a girl of 9 who was also eleven when I visited again. It would have been preferable to have included another case-study of a boy, but the paucity of sons in the original sample and the fact that several of their families had moved away in the interim period meant that there were far fewer families with boys to follow up.

12.1 Sheila Watson and Joanna

Sheila Watson married in the early sixties and moved with her husband to South Africa, where Joanna was born in 1970. At the time of the first interview Joanna was almost nine, and she and her mother were living in a rented terraced house in a university town in England. Sheila was studying as a mature student at the polytechnic. She felt that her husband had been an important source of influence on her ideas about sex roles when they first married, and discovered they had differing expectations about the roles each would perform.

"I expected him to pay the bills because my father always had, and he expected me to do things because his father had died when he was ten and his mother was very emancipated . . . it meant we had to think a lot about roles and start from scratch. We made out lists of all the jobs we did in the week and swapped, so he'd do the cooking for a week - it was unheard of in the early sixties, my friends at work were appalled!"

When Joanna was born Sheila gave up her work as a secretary.

"I decided I'd like to enjoy her, so I didn't have any paid employment - but I did start a university course when she was three months old, and I did lots of voluntary work."

Joanna's father had a flexible research job which meant he could arrange his working hours to some extent to fit in with childcare. "If I wanted to go out in the morning he could stay at home." But although he helped to look after the baby the major responsibility definitely remained with Sheila, and the arrangements she made to ease the burden of childcare were largely with other women. "I got together with three friends and we took each other's children one afternoon a week."

When Joanna was nearly three they moved back to England, and soon afterwards Sheila left her husband and moved with Joanna to their present house, where she lived first on social security and then on a grant, and more recently on her wage as a research worker at the university. At eleven, Joanna's perception of her mother is of someone who does work outside the home. She said "She's always been working in the sense that when she wasn't employed she did life modelling and things."

Sheila sees non-sexist childrearing as a way of broadening Joanna's horizons.

"I want her to use all her potential, all the abilities she's got, and not be stopped from doing things she can do by her ideas about other people's expectations and her own expectations of limits of roles. I want her to do all

that she can do and not be held back or stopped from achieving things by these kinds of ideas. I'd like girls to become more assertive and self-determining, taking charge of their own lives, and boys learning to be more caring and nurturing. That's the sort of change I'd like to see."

The main way in which she appeared to be trying to achieve this was by encouraging Joanna to be questioning and critical, giving her plenty of confidence and treating her as much as possible as an equal. The kind of toys, books and clothes Joanna was given seemed to be very much a secondary issue, although this was obviously partly due to her age. In the past, Sheila had encouraged her to wear practical clothes and to play with meccano and construction kits as well as dolls, but at eleven Joanna was making her own decisions about what she wore and the books she read and how she spent her time, which although they showed the influence of her mother's ideas were also a reflection of her own individuality.

"I'm not very keen on conventional trousers like jeans. I like baggy trousers and knickerbockers. I quite like skirts but if I know I'm going to be climbing trees and rolling around in the muck then I'll wear trousers because I find skirts pretty impractical. But I'm glad that as a girl I'm allowed to wear both."

"A lot of the adverts on television are horrid. I think my best programme is Tomorrow's World, that's really great."

"I like adventure stories that aren't too scary. I've read one of Ursula Le Guin's Earthsea books and I want to read the other two. My mother's just read The Left Hand of Darkness, or the Right Hand of Darkness, and she said I ought to try it - but I don't know if I will!"

The main impression on first meeting Joanna was of her self-confidence and her ability to tolerate holding different views from many of her contemporaries. She described herself as 'a bit of a loner', although she did have friends of both sexes - "in fact I think I have more contact with boys than a lot of girls my age do." She also felt she had more freedom and independence than many of her friends. She regularly travelled alone to London to visit her father (forty miles on the coach) and stayed up late at night talking with him. "A lot of my views come from my father, he's a big influence on me at the moment". Although recognising that Joanna was growing increasingly close to her father, Sheila felt that she was also developing a realistic view of him which would stand her in good stead in her relationships with men.

"She's very fond of him, but she's also entirely realistic about his limitations. They're things she's picked up for herself, I've always had a very strict policy of not criticising him to her. She sometimes comes out with things like 'he'd be a difficult person to live with, I think' or 'he's quite a hard person to get to know'. I'm delighted, because I think she'll be realistic about other men too."

When Joanna described her hobbies and interests, she also showed what came over as a realistic knowledge and acceptance of her own abilities, with little trace of boasting.

"I'm a good gymnast. I collect labels and I read quite a bit. I'm very creative - I don't make anything specific, just get bits of stuff together like cardboard boxes and make things out of them."

When Joanna was nine Sheila was considering sending her to the more academic of the two local secondary schools, 'because she's a bright person and needs structure and I want her to do all the things she can do and be pushed a bit. I wouldn't keep her there if it was making her unhappy, but I want her to achieve whatever she can do and be pushed.' When I visited them again two and a half years later, Joanna had started at this school and was 'doing well there, although she was lukewarm in her opinion of the place.

"School's alright . . . I say alright, I'm not mad on it, but it'd be wrong to say I hated it."

Certain lessons she did enjoy, particularly craft, woodwork, science, and civics lessons 'where we have interesting discussions on lots of topics'. Several of the teachers at her school also questioned traditional values, and Joanna's upbringing helped her to pick up on this.

"She asked the civics teacher one day if he thought competitiveness at games was a good idea, and he said 'no, why?' and she said 'I thought I saw that you'd been discouraging us from being competitive at games', and he said she was absolutely right. Now she's discovered that her class teacher is a feminist. She noticed she was down as Ms rather than Miss and asked her why, and her teacher said they'd printed it wrong before. She picks up on things like that, it reinforces what she already knows."

At eleven Joanna was very aware of sex role stereotyping. She satirised for me a Camay soap advert from the television, and appeared to have a fairly sophisticated understanding not only of the nature of sex roles but also of the kind of pressures that made it difficult to break out of them.

"Boys can't wear skirts, which I think gives them more of a limit, they can't have so much variety. I can't see why, it doesn't seem fair that since girls are allowed to wear trousers, boys shouldn't be allowed to wear skirts. But I must admit that I - and everyone else I should think - would find it very odd if they saw a boy walking past in a skirt. But I still don't think that it's quite fair."

"If a girl wanted to do football at our school, she'd probably be allowed to if she said 'look, please may I do football', and if she had the courage to do it with all the boys, which I certainly wouldn't. I'm pretty sure she'd be allowed to, but as it is no-one says anything so it's just automatically boys only."

"If I saw a woman bricklayer, it would make me sort of stop and think for a minute or two - not because I think a woman shouldn't be doing it, but because it'd be different, because at the moment women don't do very much of that sort of stuff. Like if people are working in a team and there's one woman on it, say they're working re-tiling a roof or doing up a house, reporters always focus on the woman, and they'd have a headline about cuts and grazes, but if it was only men, a) they probably wouldn't take any notice and b) they'd probably focus on the skills of it."

"I like playing with boys and girls, I mean I don't particularly go straight for girls, but I don't play with boys so much at school because of what they'd say, the pressures they'd put on you, boys and girls. They'd say 'aah!! . . . you can't say two words to a boy without them thinking you're immediately in love or something. I don't think they really do think that, I haven't quite worked out the motives yet. I think they may be uncomfortable, almost, relating

"with someone of the opposite sex. But then it seems to be alright for brothers and sisters. I don't like the way it is, but I don't do it, simply because of what they'd say."

Much of this awareness undoubtedly came from Joanna's discussions with her mother (and increasingly as she got older from reading Sheila's feminist magazines), but neither of them experienced this as a case of Sheila imposing her values on her daughter. More often it was Joanna who asked the questions, "like the other day she asked me whether Jesus was a feminist". Joanna felt she didn't talk very much with her mother specifically about sex role issues.

"I talk with her a lot about the universe in general, but not very much about that - but then I suppose if you asked me if I talked about something else, I'd say we didn't talk very much about that either."

(So it's not as if she sits you down and says 'this is what I think about this?')

"No, it's always me who starts everything! I ask a question and she answers me!"

(Are there any things Sheila won't let you watch on television or doesn't like you reading?)

"I don't think so. She's never said."

In some cases Joanna used her awareness to be critical of instances where she felt her mother failed to live up to her own ideals. Sheila described how she delegated certain tasks to male friends, not because she couldn't do them but because she didn't want to.

"When men friends come around here and help me sometimes, she'll often ask me why don't you do it? One friend likes chopping wood and will come and chop wood for us - but then he also helps us to cook. She's quite acute about that. I say I do it myself sometimes, but if Alan wants to do it and it's a help to us that's fine. I don't in fact do things like putting up shelves; I just don't get around to it - but I tell her that doesn't mean I can't."

Joanna obviously wasn't prepared to accept this argument.

"She probably can now, but then she said she couldn't put up shelves in the alcove in the room next door, and she said 'great, Alan's coming and he can put up those shelves!' I've a slightly low opinion of her on that. Partly its the way I am, if something has to be done I'm very likely to launch into it straight away whether I know a thing about it or not, and just work it out, because I think most things are pretty simple. So if I'd been in my mother's situation I'd have put up the shelves straight away, provided I had a drill. I wouldn't wait for anyone to come along and say 'this is how you're meant to do it!'"

She also disagreed with her mother over the issue of positive discrimination.

"She thinks its a good idea, and I'm not particularly keen on it. My father belongs to the SDP and he said they had a vote on whether they should have positive discrimination or not, and most of the women voted against it because they said they'd like to get somewhere because they're good, not because they're women. I think I tend to take that view."

Such disagreements were more likely to be taken by Sheila as an indication of success than as a cause for concern.

"My line seems to be that I try and give her the groundwork and then leave her to make her own decisions - I try and encourage her to be critical, so that when the time comes she can even look at those ideas and say I don't think those are for me - and I hope that would be okay."

This respect for Joanna as a separate person with her own ideas was evident in much of Sheila's conversation and in her behaviour with her daughter. She seemed to treat Joanna as far as possible as an equal, expecting her to share the housework since they were both out for most of the day, including her in conversations, accepting as well as giving feedback and criticism, and providing her with whatever information she asked for. "I reckon she needs all the information she can get, and learn to be critical". As Joanna grew older, this openness was extended to include issues concerned with sexuality - reading and discussing books (the 'Teenager's Guide to Sex' which Joanna got out of the library, a book called 'Have you started yet?' which Sheila gave to Joanna and she then lent to her friends), talking about menstruation and contraception, discussing relationships. Sheila mentioned that Joanna knew about homosexuality and was sometimes taken out by two men friends of hers who were lovers, but most of their discussion centred around heterosexuality.

"The other day I asked her whether she minded when I slept with one of my men friends and she said 'I can tell when you do because you leave your thing with a cap out in the bathroom' - she'd noticed that, and it didn't bother her at all."

At the same time Sheila felt she would be unhappy if Joanna experimented sexually too young. 'Too young' meant under sixteen, which she jokingly remarked was 'as far as I can think - the age will probably go up as she gets older and

I'll be saying 'not before you're twenty' or something ridiculous''. She felt that her ideas about sex and relationships had changed since the first interview when Joanna was nearly nine.

"I've been thinking more and more that a lot of us use sex to feel good about ourselves, as a chance to talk really closely to people and for physical contact, so as long as she feels good about herself and gets plenty of hugs and has that self-confidence, I don't think she's going to need to do that."

Her concern that her child not get involved in any kind of permanent relationship too early was common to many of the parents I interviewed, particularly parents of daughters, but in practice Sheila felt it was unlikely to be a problem with Joanna.

"I can't imagine her being boy-mad. She knows she's an attractive woman, and she can already see that boys like her. One or two of our male friends have said that we'll have problems later, but I don't think so. I think she's sufficiently centred to be able to deal with that. She's very much her own person."

Joanna herself couldn't imagine getting married young, and in fact was unenthusiastic about the idea of marrying at all.

"When I'm 25, and if I kept my head as it is now, I possibly wouldn't be married. I probably wouldn't have got seriously involved with anyone by then because I'd think myself a bit young. Twentyfive is maybe alright, but any younger, putting myself now in that position, I'd think myself too young for it. But then, I'm not incredibly keen to go through all the stuff of being married. I'd rather live like Joe and Sally do (unmarried with children). I'd like to have kids, say one, or two at the limit. I'd

"expect the father to get involved as well. I'd expect him to put his hand in the nappy bin too! I think he should take a fair share, like one day I do the nappies and everything and the next day he looks after them . . . or hour to hour maybe."

She seemed to have thought equally carefully about possible careers.

"At the moment I want to be a vet. I think you need about four years at a veterinary college, and good qualifications. Originally I wanted to be a doctor, then I went off that idea and thought what about a nurse and then went off that. I thought I'd really like to do something with animals. I thought about working in kennels or a cattery, but I want to do something doctory without being a doctor, so I thought of a vet."

Paid work was something that appeared to be a taken-for-granted part of her conception of adult life. Sheila felt that her own example as well as their discussions had influenced Joanna to expect women to have a role outside the home too.

"She said the other day, 'you know its very good for me that you've finished your degree because it shows me that you can work hard and do something, its a good example.'"

Her example in terms of being a single parent was something Sheila felt less sure about in the first interview.

Although she saw various advantages in being a single parent (Joanna saw her doing many of the traditionally 'male' jobs around the house, and also saw her father doing all the domestic work in his flat when she visited in the holidays), she expressed some doubts about bringing up her daughter alone.

"My ideas about the family are fairly mixed. Although I can see that the nuclear family has a lot of disadvantages it's a very comfortable sort of business in other ways, and my slight confusion over that probably comes over to her. And the fact that I'd really rather she had a man about as a model, to make more of a group. I don't think its very good really just having her and me looking at each other. I think a bigger group would be healthier for us both. I suppose I've some . . . not really guilt, but something that makes me not quite clear about some of the issues with her."

Two and a half years later, Joanna's character and Sheila's own experience of increasing support from the Women's Movement had given her more confidence in the way that Joanna was being brought up and the possibility of 'changing sex roles. In terms of her aims in non-sexist childrearing, i.e. helping children to develop their potential in both traditionally masculine and feminine directions, Sheila felt that her daughter was more than fulfilling her hopes. She was interested in science at school, capable with tools and very confident and independent, whilst also being caring and sensitive to other people's needs; reminding Sheila to take spare tampons with her when they were going out, noticing that the sink was blocked with hairs and cleaning out the trap, feeding the cat .

"I'm more convinced now that its possible to bring up a child in a less sexist way. She may turn around when she's twenty and amaze me, but from what I see her doing and saying now I doubt it. She's entirely confident that everything she does is fine and that she has every right to try things out. She has a

"tremendous sense of her own ability, she's very self-confident. She's very much her own person, she'll get on and do things for herself and make a lot of decisions for herself. She's very nice to have around!"

12.2 Jeanne Rosen, Mike Underwood and Josh

Jeanne Rosen works as a part-time W.E.A. tutor teaching French and Women's Studies, and has recently begun studying on an M.A. course. Mike Underwood is a free-lance writer. They live together in a terraced house with Josh, Jeanne's son, who was almost eight at the time of the first interview and nearly eleven by the second. Jeanne comes from a close Jewish family in a French-speaking part of Canada. After leaving school and completing a psychology degree she travelled to England where she met and married her husband John. Both continued working for several years in academic jobs, and then Josh was born. Having a child, and the growth of the Women's Liberation Movement around that time, made Jeanne increasingly aware of the inequalities in her marriage.

"I remember a meeting that was held here and I wanted to participate, but the baby was making too much noise so I was sent upstairs - and a workshop on childhood which we both wanted to go to, but Josh was ill so John went and I stayed at home. I got angrier and angrier."

When he was two Josh started attending the local community nursery, which was unusual in having explicitly non-sexist aims. Girls were encouraged to use tools, fight back when attacked, be adventurous, curious and confident. Boys

were encouraged to help in the kitchen and to be gentle and sensitive. Adults tried to behave in non-sex-stereotyped ways themselves. Jeanne described herself as "definitely enthused" by these ideas and keen to put them into practice at home too. John had by then accepted non-sexist ideals, in principle anyway, but he often found it difficult putting them into practice. He related to Josh in a rough -and-tumble kind of way rather than being able to show his affection more gently, and reacted angrily when Josh wanted one morning to wear a dress to walk with Jeanne to the nursery. A male friend joined their household, which Jeanne felt was a "great step forward" in their attempts to live in a less stereotyped way, but she still retained the ultimate responsibility for the household duties, and for providing Josh with physical affection and emotional warmth.

When Josh was five she and John separated (and later divorced) and since then Jeanne has lived with her lover, Mike. She describes him as "a remarkably non-chauvinistic person", but says they do have arguments about the Women's Movement. "He thinks that class is the primary division in society and I'd argue that its sex". He is not as committed to anti-sexism as an ideology as Jeanne is.

"I think its important, but I wouldn't put it at the top of my list of priorities. I'm more perturbed to read in the paper today about the ozone belt disappearing than I am about

women getting less on the payroll".
(Mike)

On the other hand, Mike felt he would be "unhappy living in a house where everything was done according to traditional sex roles, and I don't think Josh should be constricted in that way either". Most of the household duties were in practice shared. Jeanne and Mike cooked in turn, had specific areas to clean, and divided the shopping between them (Jeanne bought the vegetables, Mike did the big supermarket shop and Josh as he got older fetched things from the local shops). Mike did his own washing, while Jeanne washed for herself and Josh. She paid the mortgage (since it was her house) and Mike paid most of the bills. Both did decorating and repair work, although Mike felt he did more of the latter and Josh's perception backed that up. "Mike does it but Jeanne helps". They didn't own a car.

Childcare was less evenly divided. Mike picked Josh up from school on two days of the week, cooked for him when it was his turn to make the meal, put him to bed every other night when Josh was younger and was often the one to look after him if he was ill, since he worked at home. Jeanne however took by far the larger share of both the practical caring and the sense of responsibility for Josh. Partly this was because he was her child.

"I'm the one who has the strongest emotional relationship with him in the household, and I do have more authority over him in the sense that he knows I'm his parent and what I say in the end counts."

(Jeanne)

"Things like reading him a story or putting him to bed were shared, but things like deciding when he needs a bath I've got nothing to do with. Jeanne has the overall say with regard to him."

(Mike)

During the time I spent with them, Josh's requests for permission to do things were inevitably addressed to his mother.

Josh: "Can I go out on my bike for twenty minutes?"

Jeanne: "No, only ten." (He argues)

Jeanne: "Okay, fifteen minutes till 8.30."

Mike felt that there was little point in him attending parent evenings at Josh's school, since "one of us needs to stay at home with Josh and it seems more logical for Jeanne to go - besides I don't know what I'd say, 'I'm not his father but I live in the same house?'" He felt that Josh's father had been a greater influence than he was on Josh's character. "I think his emotional make-up was largely formed before I came on the scene". What he felt he did share with Josh was his sense of humour, and also many interests and hobbies - information gathering, drawing maps, football, train-spotting. At teatime much of Josh's conversation was with Mike, asking about place names in America,

having his spelling corrected.

"I perform the role of teacher in a certain sense, I relate to him in terms of playing games and talking about things. We talk about his school, ideas, history, geography."
(Mike)

Most of these were traditionally 'masculine' activities, although Mike felt he would involve a daughter in them too.

"In fact in a way it might be easier with a girl, because with Josh it's too easy for me to relate to him in 'male' ways, because he's very much looking for a father-figure all the time."
(Mike)

Mike wasn't aware of encouraging any 'feminine' qualities in Josh but felt that was "because he's got them already".

"I think the ideal is a balanced person, someone who has both characteristics. I'd hate him to be a really aggressive kid, but in fact he's not aggressive at all to the point of being completely malleable. He's not aggressive enough, to cope with school for example. No - assertive is a better word than aggressive, he won't assert himself. I think its very important that a child learns to co-operate - traditional 'feminine' qualities like co-operation and aesthetic sense and so on - but Josh has those anyway. It almost seems as though its the 'male' characteristics he's lacking, and I tend to find myself in the position of wanting to impart male characteristics to him."
(Mike)

Jeanne had similar aims, of a child who could combine the best of traditionally 'feminine' and 'masculine' qualities, although she talked more about how she was trying to encourage the 'feminine' aspects. She wanted Josh to

be sensitive and aware, able to look after himself in terms of cooking, cleaning, mending, etc., able to think about things and to analyse his own and other's behaviour and emotions. She laid great emphasis on what she termed 'verbalisation': discussing ideas and helping Josh to see the reasons behind people's behaviour. The level of explanation was quite complex, and reflected Jeanne's psychological background. (She said later that although she held generally left-wing views, "I don't think politically, I think psychologically".)

"If his friends are not nice to him, I try to explain it to him psychologically, so-and-so has to act that way because he's a little brother and his big brother always acts to him in the way he acts to you . . . If people mock him at school for being weak I say its maybe because they themselves are weak, or they're just jealous."

(Jeanne, first interview)

Mike had less faith in the power of such analysis.

"Jeanne's a great believer in talking, if there's a problem you can talk it out. I don't believe that. Obviously sometimes its good to talk to him, but I think its mostly what you do."

Much of Jeanne's discussion of sex role issues with Josh was aimed at helping him to understand the distinction between gender identity and sex role, which she believed was 'integral to the practice of non-sexist education'.

"To try to raise a child in a non-sexist way is first of all to try to separate what belongs to boy and girl from what they're expected to do. 'That's fine, you're a boy, if you want to have short hair okay, if you want to wear dresses okay,

"if you want to play with girls that's okay, but at the same time I want you to be sensitive and aware and help in the house and know how to look after yourself."

(Jeanne)

She felt that in her emphasis on the importance of this distinction she had moved away from the early community nursery days when she saw the main things as providing 'opposite sex' toys and encouraging non-traditional behaviour. She said she had tried in the past to encourage Josh to play with traditionally 'girls' toys, but on the whole he had resisted this.

"I did buy him a little doll and he stuffed it into his car, he just was not interested. He wanted to play with guns and cars. I don't think one can be very successful in terms of toys."

She was reluctant to censor or forbid Josh any particular toys, or for the matter books, although she did discuss the sex roles portrayed in them with him.

"I'd rather be too non-authoritarian than too non-sexist. I think you can get at it from other ways. I think I would express a very strong disapproval, sort of emotional blackmail, rather than saying 'I don't want you to play with that toy'. I would expect him to make a free decision - of course, it wouldn't be a free decision, but I don't like forbidding him. Although I do express . . . like he has some friends at school who are very rough, and I keep on saying 'I don't like those people, they are very rough', and there was a time when he said to me: 'I've met this boy, he's not very rough' - because I'd said I didn't like people who played and acted rough!"

When he first started school Josh had picked these more aggressive, boisterous, strong boys as those he would

like as friends. His mother described him as a shy, reserved and non-aggressive child, and felt that the school environment was often a difficult one for him to cope with. Her solution, again, was to talk about it with him and to try to increase his understanding.

"I think he suffers a lot at school, because people actually call him weak, because he doesn't fight. It does bother him, and we do a lot of talking with him about it. We said that first of all aggression is not equatable with being very strong, cleverness counts much more, that there is no need for him to fight. Maybe he doesn't play very good football, but then he should practice more - but that is an irrelevant issue. I try, both Mike and I try very hard to unravel for him what it means, and make him feel it doesn't matter."

(Jeanne)

Jeanne analysed her own relationship with Josh and her feelings about the mother/son tie within the same kind of psychological framework.

"I think mothers feel that their boys are vulnerable but their girls aren't, and fathers feel their girls are vulnerable but that their sons aren't. I do feel Josh is vulnerable, that I have to protect him, I feel he can't be . . . I feel this pain, I feel . . . Mike says 'he can cope with it', but I feel he can't. A woman I know with two girls says her husband tells her 'they can't do that, you can't let them do that' and she says 'of course they can, they're strong enough'. Maybe its partly because you understand your own sex better. I feel that Josh is a foreign person, you know, I cannot actually recognise anything he's going through, while my friend can recognise a lot of things about her daughter but again about her son she's very protective."

(Jeanne)

This sense of Josh's vulnerability was reflected in her concern about his whereabouts and his safety. A friend, also eight years old, came to ask if Josh could come to his bonfire party down the road. Jeanne finally agreed on condition that Josh be very careful, make sure the adults lit all the fireworks and be back by 8.15 p.m. at the very latest. She worried about him crossing busy roads ("Once he crossed a very dangerous road with a friend who knew how to cross it, but I was very angry with him - I went into it in a bit of depth and said you're my only child and you have to be responsible enough 'to keep yourself alive') and she was concerned about him reaching puberty (I'm dreading that! I'm always afraid of him getting into "bad company" and getting to be a vandal or someone who really rebels in that sense - though I think maybe I underestimate him, I'm beginning to realise that when he says 'no' he does actually mean it")."

Jeanne's familiarity with psychological literature led her to feel, particularly by the time of the second interview, that Josh needed to separate himself from her in order to form his own identity.

"He's very attached to me, and I'm really his only parent. I think its harder for a boy . . . he has to grow up and detach himself from me, whereas a girl could just see me as a liberated woman and model herself on me."

One way in which Josh appeared to be trying to achieve this separation was through identifying with other boys and with 'masculine' interests. At eight, he shared many of Mike's interests, and at eleven was very much wanting to do things with other boys of his own age, and pressing for more freedom. He felt he was allowed to do 'quite a lot less than many of my friends'. His current interests (train-spotting, 'getting a Red Bus Rover ticket and just going on buses with my friends', racing bikes) were all ones which took him away from home and hence from parental intervention. Talking to him when he was eleven, he readily listed his friends (all male - 'we don't play with girls, we usually play cricket and football and they don't like that much') and he was prepared to talk a little about his interests and hobbies, but he was far more reticent when questioned about his views on sex roles. Jeanne had explained why I wanted to talk with him, but he refused to be drawn on topics like feminism, sex role stereotyping or teasing at school or how he imagined living as an adult. He did say that Jeanne didn't talk with him much about sex roles any more. "She used to, but she's said what she has to say". He added that "she tells me things, but she doesn't influence me". Jeanne said afterwards that she felt Josh did have a good grasp of what sexism meant and that he could be very articulate and talkative, but that people rarely saw that side of him

outside of family and close friends because of his shyness. She also felt that he did have 'feminine' interests but that he wouldn't see them that way, such as his ability to analyse situations and discuss motives. "I know he feels that gives him an edge over the other boys, and that's important to him".

(Jeanne)

Discussing the pressures on Josh at primary school to be tough, and the difficulties caused for him by his non-aggression, Jeanne said that "he will suffer probably until he gets to secondary school, when brains will count more, hopefully." When I talked to them three years later, Josh was about to start secondary school and had chosen to go to an all-boys ex-grammar school where the pupils wore uniform. His mother said that "his main concern was to go to a school where it wouldn't be rough". Jeanne obviously had mixed feelings about this decision. The non-sexist parents in my study were divided in their opinions of the benefits of single-sex schooling for girls, but they were almost unanimous in thinking that mixed schooling was more likely to encourage the qualities of sensitivity and co-operation that they wanted for their sons.

"At first I really didn't want him to go to that school, but he was very keen. I don't feel very happy about the single-sex aspect

"of things. I keep hoping some of his friends will have sisters. On the other hand I think that school can cope with a large variety of personalities, they don't have to do the boyish things at lunchtime but can go to the library or do experiments."

(Jeanne)

She felt the school would be able to cope with Josh's personality; intelligent, cautious, imaginative, shy and quiet. She saw him as someone who was sensitive and socially aware, and wanted him to be able to develop these characteristics.

"He tends to be quite in touch with his feelings and with the feelings of other kids in his class. For example he came home the other day and said 'there was this new little boy in class and nobody was playing with him so I helped him'."

(Jeanne, first interview)

It was these kinds of personality characteristics, more than the sort of activities her son engaged in, which Jeanne stressed in her account of non-sexist childrearing. Josh's interests and friendships at eleven were mostly traditionally 'masculine' ones. He was, according to his mother, increasingly aware of sex role stereotypes. He pointed out sexist advertisements on television, felt the secondary school should offer Home Economics to boys, and accepted that he should do his share of the housework. "I no longer have to give him a whole talk about why he should".

"Its also the sorts of things he doesn't say. For example he never really says anything like 'boys should do this' or 'girls can't do that

"because they're not strong enough'. On the contrary, it seems as though to Josh the girls are quite strong. In fact he says at his school the girls hold the cards in their hands and the boys have to follow on. He doesn't classify the world in terms of boys and girls at the level of capacities, though I think he's beginning to in terms of who likes who . . . I mean that's a natural thing".

(Jeanne)

Although he might have been aware of the limitations of sex role stereotyping, Josh at eleven definitely wanted to be like most other boys of his own age in terms of his interests and activities. Both Jeanne and Mike felt that they were less influential now than they had been in the past, although Jeanne was trying to keep the channels of communication open.

"All I can do is keep my relationship with him as alive and important as possible so that the things I say will actually influence him and make him aware of what's happening. If his relationship at home is one where he can discuss things, I think that's the central thing I want to keep."

(Jeanne)

"How far he'll take our ideas into his own life I think only he can decide now. I think he's got to an age where it's either stuck or it hasn't."

(Mike)

12.3 Jenny Chadwick, Bob Perkins, Lucy and Becky

At the time of the first interview Jenny Chadwick was thirty and Bob Perkins thirty-seven, and their twin daughters Lucy and Becky just three and a half. They were living together in a privately rented flat but

wanting to move to a council house, Jenny mainly for practical reasons ("the landlady won't do any repairs") and Bob for ideological ones (he resented paying money to a private owner). Both were working, Bob as a typesetter in a printing firm, Jenny as a fulltime student. The children had attended the college creche for eighteen months but moved recently to a childminder when their parents could no longer afford the fees.

Jenny and Bob had both worked out their ideas concerning sexual equality before they came together. Bob had been married before and had an eleven-year-old daughter whom he saw at weekends and holidays, and had lived on his own for several years before meeting Jenny. She was also married when they met, and stayed involved with both men for a couple of years. When she became pregnant she considered bringing up the children herself, but in the end Bob moved in two weeks before they were born, and they both stayed home for the first few months of the twins' life - partly to get to know the children and partly to adjust to living together. They then tried to get part-time jobs, so that they could share paid work and childcare, but found it impossible. "I would have had no difficulty, but Bob came up against a complete wall of opposition. It was out of the question in printing, a production job". Various applications for

shared jobs also proved unsuccessful. "Bob started getting terribly depressed and worried about money and what we were going to do, so when the girls were about seven months old he went back to work fulltime and I stayed at home fulltime, looking after them."

Neither found this arrangement satisfactory. Jenny felt depressed and isolated at home and Bob disliked the responsibility of having to keep them, and not seeing much of the children. They felt it was doing their relationship harm, and making it difficult to set a non-sexist example.

"We found in the short period when we did have traditional roles, that we started fitting into them. Bob started feeling things like 'you're spending all my money' and I'd say 'I need some money to buy the children shoes' and he'd come in and say 'what have you been doing all day?' . . . not all the time, just when you were feeling tired and dispirited, these things would come up, and we felt it was doing us a lot of damage and it was found to have been noticed by the children if it had persisted."

(Jenny)

Jenny enrolled as a student at the local polytechnic and found places for Lucy and Becky in the creche. She took them in in the morning, as Bob had already left for work, and he generally collected them in the evening as she often had late lectures and practicals. At home they shared most of the childcare and domestic tasks, both

doing the cooking, cleaning, washing, shopping and ironing; both feeding the children (once they were no longer breast-fed), changing their nappies, bathing them (except that Bob rarely washed their hair), putting them to bed, reading and playing with them, disciplining and cuddling them.

"We don't have his jobs and my jobs, we just muck in and do whatever's needed."
(Jenny)

"If either of us goes away for any time, then the other can run the household. You don't have to say where everything is kept, for instance."
(Bob)

Some tasks were specialised, but not along particularly sex-typed lines. Bob did most of the Hoovering and tidying up and any large-scale carpentry; Jenny did the electrical repairs and most of the sewing, fixed the car and was the only one who could drive. The way they allocated tasks when observed in practice closely resembled their description of their division of labour in the interviews.

They felt this example was very important in presenting their daughters with alternatives to traditional sex roles. However, in terms of responsibility for childcare arrangements, and looking after the children in holidays or when they were ill, Jenny maintained the basic responsibility. She had chosen to do a degree rather than take

a paid job because it would allow her to take time off. Bob's work made no concession to family responsibilities - "he only gets three days uncertified sick leave, and if he takes an hour off he loses an hour's pay" - and as they were struggling financially they could not afford to lose that money. Bob thought that when Jenny was qualified and able to earn more, they would probably be able to split it more evenly because he could afford to pretend to be ill more often. One of the dominant themes in their account was the importance of economic and structural factors in affecting the extent to which they could put their non-sexist ideas into practice. They described clearly the constraints placed on their ability to share childcare and paid work by the structure of the job market; the unequal employment opportunities for women and the lack of adequate childcare facilities.

When I went back to talk to them again nearly three years later, their circumstances had altered in several respects. They had made the move to a council house, Jenny had finished her degree and begun a teacher training course, and Bob had taken a job as a fulltime official for his union which eased their financial worries. For the first time they could afford a holiday, to buy new clothes for the children, and to shop on any day of the week rather than the day after Bob had been paid. In some ways his new job

permitted greater flexibility in terms of sharing childcare. Depending on his schedule he could occasionally take them to school in the mornings, and was more able to take time off if they were ill - although this flexibility was somewhat balanced by frequent evening meetings and his inability to 'switch off' the job after nine till five. Childcare arrangements were still a permanent worry however, and one which Jenny felt the more keenly.

"It always has been and still is my responsibility. In the past year or so its become even more my responsibility, a) to find a childminder, b) to take them to school or childminder and c) to pick them up."

She talked at length in the second interview about the new childminder who was going to look after Lucy and Becky after school, and after the evening meal she was the one who rang up to check when their (male) babysitter would arrive. Jenny felt that the problem of adequate childcare "just isn't soluble with the present system", and that their experiences, especially in the previous year when Lucy developed asthma and was at home ill a lot, had led her to think more and more that:

"Where you've got two parents (even more so with single parents) neither should have a fulltime job. I'm not saying they should only work part-time, but that their work should be reduced in some way, either to school terms or reduced in the length of the day."

Both she and Bob (who had become a county councillor) were campaigning within the Labour party for changes in

statutory employment policies similar to those in Sweden, which would make it easier to combine paid employment and family responsibilities. But Jenny was beginning to worry that in the current economic climate she would find it difficult to get a job at all once she finished her teacher training.

"Things have changed in both directions really since I last talked to you. We're better off financially, they only need childcare after school, I'm nearly at the end of my course and Bob's doing a job he really wants to so he's more fulfilled . . . but on the other hand, there are very worrying things to think about, like cuts in education and cuts in jobs. I don't know whether I'll get a job at the end of my training. Just as I'm reaching the end and looking forward to being more independent I can see it being snatched away from me."
(Jenny)

Aside from their attempts to alter the structural conditions which made shared childrearing difficult, and their efforts to live in as non-stereotyped a way as possible themselves, Jenny and Bob felt that an important part of their childrearing policy was discussing sex role issues with the children, at a level which they could understand. They did try not to restrict them to 'girls' toys, to provide them with construction kits, cars and toolsets as well as dolls and teasetts, and to find non-sexist books in the local library (Bob usually chose them in his lunch hour), but they were reluctant to forbid any particular toys, books or television programmes and felt there was little they would stop the children having or

watching if they were really keen, except perhaps violent war toys. When his older daughter Laura was younger Bob described buying her trainsets and model-making kits.

"But it never really worked. I think she was conscious it had been grafted onto her, and she never played with the darned things! She never said anything, but it never struck a chord with her the way that things I knew she wanted and bought for her did . . . we've not done that with Lucy and Becky."

(Bob)

"We were a bit worried about the idea of toys, things like dolls prams and that, and we talked about it and decided that Bob had made a mistake with Laura in stressing male-oriented toys. We felt that was a bit too artificial, that really you're not trying to stop them having things so much as opening up things which are closed to them."

(Jenny)

Mostly they tried to find the kind of toys, books and clothes which they felt fitted each child. "We try and take their personalities into account" (Bob). Despite being twins, the two girls were very different.

"Lucy's very lively and bouncy, and in some ways more insecure than Becky. Becky is very self-confident, quieter and more artistic, more creative, very self-sufficient. Lucy likes active games, Becky spends a lot of time drawing and making things. She goes for visual effects in books, and can often recognise books by the same illustrator, whereas Lucy prefers down-to-earth stories. Lucy would much rather wear trousers and shorts all of the time, she doesn't like dresses or hair all over her face, whereas Becky is very keen on dressing herself up in frilly pretty dresses and wants her hair to grow long."

(Jenny)

Meeting the two girls for the first time when they were three-and-a-half, their appearance and behaviour certainly reinforced her description. Lucy was more boisterous and extrovert, with short curly hair and a suntan. Becky was quieter and paler, with two pink ribbons in her hair and a third twisted around her fingers. She was wearing shorts and asked if she could take them off "because they're not pretty".

Jenny: That's not a good reason

Becky: What is?

Jenny: Being hot, wanting to be naked, wanting to go out somewhere.

Becky: Alright, I'm hot then.

Jenny and Bob made their views known, but generally seemed to allow their daughters to try out what they wanted. When she was three,

"Becky saw some other girl wearing ribbons in her hair and said 'why can't I have some?'. I said okay. She tends to put on necklaces and bracelets, and she'll sit looking at Top of the Pops and say 'what a lovely sequinned dress' and we just say 'ugh!' - she's got a very advanced sense of humour so we tend to just laugh and joke about it rather than getting heavy or anything."
(Jenny)

Similarly with books,

"They choose books from the library, and they know from my reaction which books I like and which I don't like, and I leave it at that. If they like them, I'll read them to them. There's one book we both hate reading, called Snuffy. Snuffy's a dog who comes across this woman crying because she's lost her daughter, and he says

"'never mind' and goes off and eventually finds this little girl, also sitting there crying. He takes her back to her mother and they say 'oh, thank you Snuffy!' Its difficult to explain to the girls why we hate it, its such an advanced concept to them . . . I mean, we say things like 'aren't they silly sitting there crying, they could easily get up and start looking', but we don't explain it in any more complicated terms than that."

(Jenny)

By the time the girls were six, they felt that one of the main changes affecting how they tried to encourage less stereotyped sex roles was the children's greater fluency and grasp of abstract ideas.

"Its easier to talk to them now that they're a bit more verbal. You can actually question some of their assumptions. If they say they want to be a nurse you can say 'have you thought about being a doctor?' - which I think we still did when they were three, but it becomes easier to explain to them what you're trying to do."

(Jenny)

"It seems to me that you've got to deal with concepts they can handle. In so far as they don't understand what you're talking about and they just receive counter-information from you, you put them in an impossible position."

(Bob)

The children seemed to be inventing their own concepts.

Jenny described how Becky had coined the term 'gunny' to categorise the boys at her nursery school. Those who were less aggressive, competitive and boisterous were 'not so gunny', and these were the ones she preferred as friends.

Jenny and Bob followed a similarly permissive policy over television programmes.

"We know people who say they don't let their children watch TV, but I don't think you can do that. We let them watch it but criticise and discuss it with them afterwards. It seems to work."

(Jenny)

Starting fulltime school had affected the children's ideas and behaviour in the area of sex roles, although to a lesser extent than many of the other parents I interviewed described. Jenny felt that in terms of sex role stereotyping, Lucy and Becky's nursery school had been more traditional than the primary school they now attended. She and Bob had rejected a Church of England school which favoured a fairly disciplined approach and forbade girls to wear trousers ("Becky and Lucy couldn't believe it when they heard that, they expect everything to be open to them") and had chosen instead a more modern school with progressive ideas, which both the girls seemed to enjoy.

"I like school. My favourite lesson's number work, I'm good at that. And read-write-and-remember work." (Lucy, 6)

"Sometimes you're allowed to make things like covering a box, that was my favourite. I like school, but we have to do things like number work and writing, that's terrible." (Becky)

Most work was done in mixed groups, although Lucy and Becky were aware that sex was the criterion often used for organisational groupings.

"There's fives, sixes and sevens in our class. The five-year-olds are at one end on little tables and they do colouring pictures. We have groups called hexagons and squares and triangles.

For dinner we line up in boys and girls, or
for telly or library."
(Lucy)

"When its dinner you have to line up in two
big lines, girls on one side and boys on the
other, and the teacher says 'let's have some
more girls!'"
(Becky)

Most of their friends at school were girls, although each
named one or two boys they sometimes played with. Jenny
felt that that was one way in which school had affected
their ideas. "They tend to play with their own sex and
that's very marked, they obviously feel the pressure to
do that."

The difference in personality and interests shown by the
two girls at three was if anything more marked by the
time they were six. Getting up in the morning, Lucy
chose a loose green tracksuit decorated with swimming
badges, Becky a 'nanny dress' which she agreed to wear
with woolly tights as the weather was cold. Lucy jumped
off chairs, noisily hugged her father, screwed together
a structure from their building kit, and tried to
interest Becky in a game of Snakes and Ladders where
she insisted on following all the rules. "My turn again,
'cos I got a six". Becky obviously wasn't interested;
her hand kept straying to a drawing pad and crayons.
She accurately summed up her sister as 'more climbingy
than me' and knew her own abilities lay particularly in
artistic activities; making Christmas decorations and

'stained glass' drawings, cutting magazine faces in half and piecing them together again in odd combinations, like the bearded man/glamorous woman face which caused her great amusement.

Jenny felt that they were in many ways more conventional in terms of sex roles than they had been at three, but that this was largely a function of their age. Both she and Bob seemed to accept that their daughters would go through a stage of wanting to fulfil fairly traditional sex roles, especially in their first few years at school, and were more concerned to keep the children's options open by stressing that there were alternative ways of doing things rather than trying to prevent them from being at all 'feminine'.

"Its just a continual positive reassertion rather than a question of stopping them doing things or controlling them."
(Bob)

Part of this 'positive reassertion' was emphasising that people chose to live and behave in ways that differed from the conventional norm. The children had a wide range of adult contacts since their parents' friends often called in; students from Jenny's college course, young single people, homosexual and heterosexual, members of the Labour party, people Bob met through his union work. Jenny and Bob had explained their own living situation to the children, and they had obviously understood.

"I heard them them talking to their friend Jeff about mummies and daddies. His parents are divorced and his mother lives with another man. He was explaining this to Lucy and she said in a matter-of-fact way that her mummy was divorced and so was her daddy - and he said how come, because they're living together? And she said oh no, they were both married to other people before, but they're not married to each other now. We hadn't realised it had all sunk in, but its nice it had, it shows its worth keep repeating things."

(Jenny)

"I think its important to be as honest as possible. I've known children given abysmal levels of information about the things that affect them."

(Bob)

This honesty included an openness about sexuality. At three, Jenny had explained to them about biological differences.

"They know the essential difference is that girls have a vagina and boys a penis - which doesn't mean to say they haven't got confused from time to time! They will tend to go around saying to the young men who come into the house 'have you got a penis? Can I see it?' They usually get terribly embarrassed!"

(Jenny)

At six:

"They are used to seeing both of us without clothes on . . . they're very clear about biological differences."

Although outwardly Lucy and especially Becky conformed to many aspects of the feminine stereotype, preferring 'girls' toys and activities and enjoying books and television programmes which Jenny and Bob saw as sexist, the effects of their parents' role-sharing and talking about sex roles were evident in the answers they gave

when questioned at age six about the kind of things women and men could do and about their own plans when they grew up. (An interesting parallel is provided by Geneva Woodruff Puffer's study of American five-to-seven-year-olds brought up in homes where different sex role attitudes prevailed; at that age the children of feminists differed little from the children of traditionalists in their actual behaviour and preferences, but they did differ in saying that men and women could behave in non-stereotyped ways if they wanted to. (Puffer 1974)

Both Lucy and Becky thought that tasks like washing up, washing clothes, shopping, putting up the shelves, cooking and cleaning were things that both mothers and fathers did.

"Mummy might be better at ironing than daddy, but daddy can iron, I don't know, and mummy can't make the toast, she burns it."

(Lucy)

They thought that men should look after babies too ("daddy used to change my nappy") and expressed surprise at the idea that women might not be able to do certain jobs.

"They can be doctors or anything - except a dog!"

(Becky)

They both saw paid work as part of their adult lives.

Becky planned to be an artist "or I might be an architect", Lucy a doctor, "but I wouldn't be a night doctor, I wouldn't work at night. I'd go to work and earn money then come back and get my tea, watch some programmes and go to bed."

It seemed to be partly Bob and Jenny's experience with Laura, Bob's older daughter, which had convinced them that encouraging non-traditional sex roles could have an effect in the longer term, even though the child might appear to adopt conventional ideas and behaviour when they were younger.

"Laura's come on a lot - she's thirteen now. She was very peer-group oriented, but lately she's become very positive in her ideas, and fairly political. The little ones will parrot our political views - it's amusing, but you realise it doesn't go very deep - but Laura will actually question and criticise what we believe in and then come out with something that she's worked out for herself."
(Bob)

They definitely wanted non-sexist ideas and behaviour to be something their children thought through and chose for themselves, rather than something that was imposed on them by their parents, and an important aim seemed to be encouraging them to be confident and articulate enough to work out what they wanted, regardless of social pressures.

"I'd like them to be balanced and capable of making their own decisions, not to be put off by pressures on them from the outside, confident enough to decide what they want to do and to attempt to do it, prepared to fight for changes and articulate enough to do that, if that's what they want to do."
(Bob)

If what they decided they wanted to do was to follow a traditionally female role, in terms of the kind of work they did or choosing to stay at home to raise a

family, Jenny and Bob felt they wouldn't be unhappy "if they chose that freely, and weren't channelled into it by the pressures of society". (Jenny)

Both Jenny and Bob viewed their non-sexism within the context of their other political ideas. "You can't separate it from your political attitudes, and your attitudes to society at large." (Bob) Bob described himself as a revolutionary socialist, Jenny was a strong Labour party supporter but felt she had put too many labels on herself in the past to want to do so again. For them, trying to raise their children in a less sex-stereotyped way was one part of working for a more equitable society, and they had wider aims about how they hoped their daughters would grow up.

"We would hope they'd be opposed to racism, concerned about people, involved in the community and politics - but those are just hopes. We try to put our views across to them and hope they will take the best of them really."
(Jenny)

12.4 Janet and Tony O'Brien, Sarah and Emma

Janet and Tony O'Brien live in a spacious suburban house which they share with another family in exchange for some childcare during the day. Janet is a university lecturer, Tony a grammar school teacher. At the time of the first interview they were married with one child, Sarah, who was just two. When I next talked to them Sarah had just started primary school and they had a second daughter, Emma,

who had just turned two herself.

Since both Janet and Tony earn good salaries, and Janet's job in particular permits a fair amount of flexibility over her working hours, they have managed to avoid some of the childcare problems which faced less materially privileged two-career families.

While acknowledging that more nurseries, greater opportunities for job-sharing and more flexible working conditions would make shared childrearing easier for many parents, they felt that such changes would have little effect on their own situation. They had bought a house large enough to share with another family, and advertised for people to live with them rent-free in exchange for childcare. Four months after Sarah was born Joe and Mary O'Reilly moved in with their three daughters. The older two were at school, and Mary O'Reilly looked after her own and the O'Brien's baby during the day. All four adults followed a rota for jobs like cooking, cleaning, shopping and washing-up. This arrangement had been continuing for eighteen months when I first spoke to them, and both Janet and Tony felt that on the whole it worked well.

"I like the continuity, and just the flexibility, that if I don't want to go to work one day I can come home and take her swimming, or alternatively leave her a bit longer. I don't have to rush home to collect her because the nursery is closing, or someone else has to go home and look after their own family."
(Janet)

"I take over when I get back from work, which can be anywhere between four and half-five . . . one afternoon a week I usually take her with me when I go ice skating with a class from school."
(Tony)

By the time of the second interview they had encountered several problems. The O'Reilly's had left to buy their own house shortly before Janet and Tony's second child, Emma, was born, and although Mary O'Reilly continued to come in to care for the children during the day she had to leave early. There was a difficult period of about a year when the O'Brien's either couldn't find anyone to move in, or those who did only stayed a short time or were not interested in shared living or childcare. As with the majority of families in this study, the worry of finding adequate childcare seemed to fall more heavily on Janet. There was also the potential problem of the children's other caretakers not sharing Janet and Tony's non-sexist ideals. The O'Reillys were an Irish Catholic family whose daughters were traditionally feminine in many respects, and many of the people who had stayed since then were conventional in their attitudes towards sex roles, with the men not always participating equally in the housework rota. Tony and Janet did not see this as a particular problem, however. They valued the opportunity for their children to live with a variety of adults (many of their lodgers were of different nationalities) and to learn that people thought and behaved

differently. They were more concerned that the children got on well with the people looking after them than that these adults were non-sexist in their attitudes and behaviour.

"We don't make an issue of sex-role stereotyping with our lodgers. Partly because we don't want to be seen as laying down the laws for the house. It is our house, and its quite difficult coming to live in someone else's house and not behaving like a guest. We wanted to get away from the idea that it's our house and we decide how things will be . . . and also there are other things that seem more important, like how well we get on with them - though I suppose ideas about sex roles are quite important in that. But I can imagine someone who had got all the right ideas about sex roles but you don't get on with them for one reason or another, and I'd rather have someone we got on with who was good with children."
(Janet)

"The main criterion is that they're good with children, someone who can play with them and enjoy being with them."
(Tony)

A consistent theme in Janet's account was a reluctance to make definite statements about what they were doing to encourage non-traditional sex-role behaviour in their daughters, or to say that they had any very conscious, worked-out policy. As a sociology lecturer she was well acquainted with much of the literature on sex roles, and frequently prefaced remarks with 'from such-and-such a theoretical position' or 'I was reading a paper the other day which suggested that . . .', but she nevertheless appeared to want to play down rather than to exaggerate any very overt attempts to raise Sarah and Emma in a

non-sex-stereotyped way.

"I suppose we do make conscious efforts to get her to play with cars and construction kits and things, and we haven't bought her many dolls - but that's just because the older kids brought hundreds and hundreds of dolls with them, there's so many around."

"I'm not sure I really want to have that much influence. I don't particularly want to see a child as mine to be moulded in the way that I want to mould her, though I do look forward to being able to talk to her and discuss things with her, get her ideas on things as well."

Janet described herself as an individualist, and seemed to take a pride in forming her own opinions rather than accepting a body of conventional wisdom, feminist or otherwise.

"The traditional feminist point of view seems to say that the early years are all-important and there's very little we can do after that, and I just think that's wrong."

She wanted her daughters to be able to form their own opinions too. When asked if she ever worried that Sarah might feel an 'odd one out' at school by being brought up with different ideas, she replied, unlike other parents interviewed, that she thought this might be a good thing.

"I suppose it can be painful, but I think there are advantages in terms of realising your individuality and thinking things out for yourself."

The value Janet placed on individuality made her reluctant to have particular ideas about the way she hoped Sarah would grow up.

"I think I'd take a laissez-faire liberal point of view that she can be whatever she likes, so long as she's had a range of opportunities or possibilities open to her."
(Janet)

Tony adopted a similar position.

"I've no clear idea what she'll turn out to be. What she wants to be is really very dependent on what her attitudes turn out to be. I think that what one does at this stage is to give her the opportunity to engage in as much, as wide a sphere of things as possible, to see what she will like doing."
(Tony)

Where Janet did have more definite ideas was about how she would not like Sarah to be, which centred around her unthinkingly accepting particular value systems and not having opinions of her own.

"I wouldn't like her to join the National Front, or leave school at sixteen and go to work in a factory . . . although I suppose if I thought the latter was an informed decision then I'd support it. I wouldn't be very happy if I saw her coming in with her boyfriend and agreeing with every single opinion that he put forward when she said quite different things on her own. I'd want her to have formed her own opinions and be able to express them and stand up for them. I suppose self-awareness basically is quite important, and self-confidence."

Although Tony, like Janet, emphasised that they didn't stop their daughters playing with traditionally feminine toys, wearing dresses or seeing sex role stereotypes in books and on television, he seemed more prepared than Janet to describe ways in which they deliberately tried to influence Sarah and Emma's perception of sex roles.

"Sarah's very keen on the Ladybird books which are very sexist, it's all firemen and policemen and so

"on, and I'll say 'look at that woman on a motorbike!' or I use 'fireperson', all this sort of stuff."

(Tony, first interview)

"Tony tends to comment on it (traditional sex roles in books etc.). He uses sarcasm, which I think is a bit advanced for a two-year-old!"

(Janet)

During the time I spent with them it often seemed to be Tony who answered the children's questions about sex roles, or created opportunities to point out people doing non-traditional work.

Sarah: (aged 2½, doing a jigsaw of a man with a brief case and bowler hat) What's that man doing?

Tony: He's going home to do the washing up.

Sarah: What's he doing?

Tony: He's going home to do the washing-up and see his baby.

Sarah: Where's the lady going?

Tony: (Looking at jigsaw of woman with shopping basket and dog in tow) She's going out to work, and the dog's barking because she's not going fast enough.

Tony: Hey Emma, did you know that June was mending a roof last week?

Emma: (aged 2) What?

Tony: She was up on a roof, helping to mend it.

Sarah: (aged 5) What's a femister? (Having seen the word 'feminist' in my notes, and asked me what it said.)

Tony: It's someone who supports women's rights.

Sarah: What's women's rights?

Tony: Some people think that women don't get treated well, don't get paid right or can't do things, and they want to change that.

Tony and Janet shared the physical care of Sarah in the hours when they weren't working. Both changed her nappies, gave her food, comforted her when upset, read and played with her, bathed and put her to bed. When Emma was born she too was cared for by both parents, although the routine changed with a second child.

"It didn't affect who did what, but it meant that whereas before we'd take turns - one would be doing childcare and the other have some free time - now we each tend to be doing something with a child."

(Tony)

In terms of emotional involvement, Tony appeared to have a warm, close relationship with both his daughters, and with Sarah in particular. In the first interview, when Sarah was two, she played in the room while Tony talked. He didn't shut her out but responded to her demands; playing with her, fetching a drink, answering questions, jumping off a chair onto cushions, letting her open his shirt and tickle his stomach, interrupting his talking to point out with amusement the string of nonsense numbers she was reciting before jumping off the chair. He obviously enjoyed her company, and when asked about important influences in his life said that having a child had been one of them.

"I've been as happy as I've ever been since this child was born. It's a fantastic experience, having a young daughter and bringing her up."

When I visited them again when Sarah was five and Emma two, the same closeness and physical warmth was apparent. Tony bathed both children while Janet did her turn on the cooking rota, and he played with them as he towelled them dry. 'I'm eating up your fingers, your arm, your leg, your bum-bum'. He read them a story, and then lay down with them till they went to sleep. The children seemed to go to both parents equally for comforting or cuddling, or to ask for something to eat or drink.

It appeared that for Janet and Tony, the essence of non-sexist childrearing lay in the kind of relationship they established with their children, rather than in any specific policy aimed at countering traditional sex roles, although discussing the issues became increasingly important as the children grew older. They did try to a certain extent to provide 'opposite-sex' toys and to alter or discuss sexism in books, and they felt it was important that the children saw both men and women sharing the household tasks, but the crucial element seemed to be developing a warm, close relationship with their daughters which would encourage their self-confidence and sense of power over their lives.

"There's a nice paper on power and powerlessness in the women's movement, where they define two different meanings of 'power' the idea of power over yourself and your own destiny, and power over others. It says that what the Women's

"Movement ought to be about is getting power over your own destiny but not getting power over others and dominating others. I think that's right. I'd want to encourage children to have that self-reliance type of power. I think that autonomy and self-confidence and self-reliance are very important."

(Janet)

Sarah at five seemed to have self-confidence in abundance. She was evidently something of a leader among her friends, and was quite happy to be 'interviewed' by me. She talked at length about school and her favourite activities.

"I like kicking balls up in trees. I like climbing the climbing frame and sliding down and putting my feet in the hoops. I like playing with balls and Lego and playing in the sandpit. I've got a bat with holes in and I measure the little apples in the garden to see if they go through the holes."

She planned to go to university or to 'be a firelady', and thought both men and women could do the same sorts of job.

"I think they can do the same. It's okay. Because I've seen a man who's been a nurse. It was in hospital when I had a broken toe."

Getting married and having babies was also part of her imagined future, and not something Janet or Tony had any inclination to discourage. In fact they talked with amusement about her 'boyfriend' Timothy, and their plans to get married and build a house at the bottom of his parent's garden.

"It's a serious thing, been going on for about six months now. At the end-of-term

"party the teachers got Tim and Sarah to give each other their heart-shaped biscuits! At one point she wasn't sure whether she was going to marry Pete or Tim, but now she's definitely plumped for Tim. He's a much better match."

(Janet)

Sarah had a very clear idea both of what her parents did outside the home ('Daddy teaches, and Mummy goes to University and sometimes she goes to secondary schools to talk to the teachers there'), and of what tasks they did inside the home. Putting up shelves and mending the car were attributed to daddy (although in fact Janet said she had put up most of the shelves in the house). - Everything else - washing up, washing clothes, cooking, shopping, cleaning and driving - was answered by 'everyone' or 'taking turns'. 'And on Friday I do the washing-up on my own. Sometimes I help daddy wash the floor. Everyone does cooking, so we always get different dinners, I like that!'

Emma at two resembled Sarah at the same age; sturdy, curly-haired and strong-willed.

"She's independent and very determined. This afternoon, both Emma and Rosa (daughter of the family now sharing their house) wanted Rosa's bottle which had some milk in it, and I said they couldn't have it. Rosa went running off to her mother wailing 'Mummy, Mummy, I want my bottle', and Emma went charging off to get the stool to reach the bottle where I'd put it."

(Janet)

Emma had recently started at the nursery school Sarah used to attend, while Sarah herself had begun full-time

schooling the week before I interviewed her parents for the second time. When I had first talked to Janet and Tony (before Sarah started nursery school), they had expressed mixed feelings about the role that nurseries and schools played in reinforcing traditional sex role stereotypes, and in how far they felt they would be able or prepared to counteract this.

"When she goes to primary school I'll certainly complain about the books they use, but I don't think you can actually do that much."
(Tony)

"I think probably quite a lot of sexism is more insulting than important, its things that offend me rather than necessarily influencing her a great deal . . . but even that seems to me a perfectly good reason for trying to avoid it! . . . When she starts primary school I think I'd want to go and talk to the headteacher and the class teacher and find out their ideas on sexism and what sort of reading schemes they use and whether they always get the boys to carry the milk crates, this sort of thing."
(Janet)

Looking back in the second interview at the nursery Sarah had attended, they felt it had been fairly traditional in its ideas about sex roles. Janet felt they had not had much choice. They had been concerned to get Sarah into a nursery school before Emma was born and had left it very late, so 'it was a question of somewhere that would accept her the next week'. Tony said there had been another nursery, but 'it refused to teach children to read'. When she turned two, Emma began at the same nursery, since her sister had already

been there and they felt she would feel more at home.

The decision over a primary school for Sarah was affected by the fact that the one she should have gone to suffered in the education cuts and was due for closure soon after she would have started, so Janet and Tony decided to send her to the Church of England School down the road instead. They weren't too happy about the religious aspect (neither, at first, was the school too happy about taking a child whose parents were definitely not religious), nor were they very keen on some of its traditional ideas about sex roles, but they liked its proximity, which meant Sarah could walk there herself, and the fact that it encouraged academic skills. Both Janet and Tony valued school success and wanted Sarah to do well. They felt she was an intelligent child who would be bored at a less academic school.

"At least there she won't be the only child in the school who can read before she starts."
(Tony)

The school required a uniform (skirts for girls), lined boys and girls up separately, divided them for sports and in the third year also separated them for craft subjects, with girls doing needlework and boys woodwork. It was this latter aspect that worried Janet most, because 'its a question of the skills they're learning, or not learning'.

"I'm not particularly bothered about sex differentiation in sport, football and rounders - I wouldn't choose it, but I

"wouldn't kick up a fuss about it. Wearing uniform is something you have to accept if you go to that school. I don't think wearing skirts inhibits them at that age, they don't mind showing their pants. They just do all the things in skirts that they'd do in jeans . . . I think there's a lot of over-emphasis on textbooks, in the sense that it's an easy thing to pick on, but I've never seen anything that's convinced me it has that much of an effect. And most of the readers don't seem too bad. But I do think the skill things are important."
(Janet)

Tony also thought that the woodwork/needlework issue was an important one.

"I'm quite looking forward to challenging them on that when she gets to the third year!"
(Tony)

When visiting the headmistress before Sarah started at the school, Janet raised the issue of subject discrimination with her. The head said she would consider it, but she didn't want to antagonise the staff involved and had more urgent priorities. Janet also sent her an Equal Opportunities Commission report stressing the importance of science education for girls. Her own academic background was in science (she completed a degree and an MSC in physics before changing to sociology), and both she and Tony thought it was important for children of both sexes, but especially girls, to acquire more scientific skills in order to cope with an increasingly technological society.

Non-sexist childrearing seemed, for them, to be a question

of helping their daughters to acquire the skills and confidence that would enable them to decide on what they wanted to do in life, and be able to do it, irrespective of sex role stereotypes. They stressed the development of individual personality characteristics and appeared to de-emphasise the role of structural and economic factors in maintaining traditional roles. However they did view non-sexist childrearing as a broader issue than simply maximising opportunities for their own children. For Janet this wider framework was provided by feminist as opposed to socialist politics, through her active involvement in various groups and through her research work on women's issues, while for Tony the links drawn by the Women's Movement between personal and political change had clearly influenced his perceptions of what they were aiming for in trying to bring up their children in a less sex-stereotyped way.

"I suppose I must believe its possible to at least alter this small section of society, hoping to influence her, otherwise I wouldn't be trying to do it. I can only see that by an accumulation of individual efforts like this is the way that you do change society . . . lots of people producing lots of children with different expectations."

(Tony)

12.5 Summary

The four case-studies presented in this chapter demonstrate the nature of the data on which the research is based, and

illustrate in greater depth some of the themes which emerged from that data. These themes include the parents' emphasis on discussion and on raising their children's awareness of sex role stereotypes; their desire to 'open up options' rather than to censor or forbid; the significance for non-sexist childrearing of the kind of relationship they established with their children in terms of lack of repression and encouragement of the child's autonomy; and the role of economic, psychological and social pressures in creating difficulties for parents trying to alter traditional sex roles, both for themselves and for their children. In the final chapter, the concepts and hypotheses which emerged from the research are summarised, and conclusions drawn from the study.

CHAPTER THIRTEENSUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS13.0 Introduction

When I began this research, I was largely influenced by the social learning perspective on sex role development. I thought I would mainly be investigating how far parents tried to encourage their sons to play with dolls and their daughters with cars, whether they altered their children's books and censored their television watching, how far they tried to share housework and childcare in order to provide 'non-sexist' models. I did ask about the difficulties of combining childcare and paid work and about more psychological obstacles which the parents might have felt they needed to overcome, but the main emphasis was on ways in which the parents were attempting to manipulate the child's environment in order to provide them with different information about sex role behaviour. The most obvious conclusion to be drawn from the study is that the conception of non-traditional sex role socialisation held by these parents is far more complex than the position taken by the social learning view with which I began the research. Non-sexist childrearing was not simply a question of parents deciding on the "right" ideas and imposing them. It was a much more

complex phenomenon, in which the parents took account of the child as a separate actor within the socialisation process, of the role of economic and structural factors, of the subordinate position of women within society, and of psychological factors within themselves and the dynamics of their relationship with their children. In the rest of this chapter, I shall summarize the main themes which emerged from the study, and then suggest some fruitful directions for further research.

13.1 Opening up Options

One of the main aims of this study was to discover what parents meant by non-sexist childrearing. A persistent theme in all of these parents' accounts was of 'opening up options' for their children. They did not see themselves as trying to reverse roles, nor as making boys more like girls or girls more like boys as they are now, but as encouraging children of both sexes to develop characteristics that the parents valued but that have traditionally been seen as 'masculine' or 'feminine'. They wanted to foster nurturance and sensitivity in boys as well as independence and adventuresomeness; to encourage girls to be assertive and confident but still to retain an ability to relate closely to others. Their ideal was the kind of androgynous personality described by Sandra Bem (1976), and they hoped that non-traditional sex role socialisation would allow children to develop more of

of their potential rather than being restricted to the kind of behaviour traditionally seen as appropriate for their sex. For most parents, the desire to 'open up options' did not extend to their child's choice of sexual partner. They distinguished between gender identity, sex role and sexual orientation (although not in those terms) and their position could best be summarised as encouraging the child to develop a stable sense of themselves as a girl or a boy, opening up the child's conception of an appropriate sex role to include both positively-valued 'masculine' and 'feminine' traits, and extending the bounds of sexual orientation to include a liberal tolerance rather than any radical encouragement of alternatives to heterosexuality.

13.2 Child as active participant in sex role learning

A second theme in the parents' accounts of non-sexist childrearing was their perception of children as active participants in the sex role learning process. They did not see children as lumps of clay waiting to be moulded, but instead as individuals with their own personalities and desires which interacted with the parents' attempts to bring them up in a less stereotyped way. This perspective was reflected in their reluctance to censor sexist books or television programmes or to forbid their children certain toys or clothing. Most parents saw themselves less as trying to shape their children's

behaviour in a particular direction through controlling aspects of the environment, but more as aiming to raise their children's awareness of sex role issues by encouraging them to be critical of sex role stereotyping for themselves. This is not to deny that issues such as stereotyping in toys, clothing and the media were seen as important by many parents. Providing 'opposite-sex' toys and games, rewarding the child for non-stereotyped behaviours, and altering the models presented to children in books and on television were all seen to prevent children from uncritically accepting that sex was a justifiable basis on which to categorise behaviour, and to provide children with opportunities to engage in a wider range of activities than normal. However, such issues occupied a much less prominent place in the parents' accounts of non-sexist childrearing than in the social learning perspective, and the critical factor underlying the parents' policies was encouraging the children's autonomy and their awareness of sex role issues. This was the basis which parents hoped would enable children to take advantage of the kind of opportunities created for them by their action over toys, books, discussion, and the sharing of housework and childcare, and would also prepare them when they grew up to fight for the kind of political changes that many parents saw as necessary in order to achieve sexual equality. The parents in this study thus rejected a view

of children as passive learners of sex roles, which would suggest providing an environment as free as possible of sex role stereotyping, and emphasised instead concepts like 'questioning', 'understanding' and 'explaining' when describing how they were trying to bring up their children in a non-sexist way.

13.3 Non-sexist versus liberal

The parents' emphasis on the child's role in the sex role learning process helped them to avoid a potential conflict between their liberal and their non-sexist values. The dilemma of wanting children to have the 'right' ideas yet not wanting to impose those ideas was a feature of most parents' accounts, but was generally resolved by their viewing non-traditional sex role socialisation as the fostering of a critical awareness in children of sex role stereotyping. Parents made their own views explicit, but encouraged children to question and criticise these views for themselves. Their stress on producing a particular kind of personality rather than a particular package of non-stereotyped behaviours is linked to another main theme in the research, the importance of the relationship between parent and child.

13.4 Importance of Parent-child relationship

One of the strongest and most consistent impressions left by the research was that the emotional quality of

the relationship between parent and child was of great importance. It may well be a crucial factor in non-sexist childrearing. It could be that what is significant, as well as the holding of a carefully worked-out non-sexist policy, is the dynamic of the relationships in which such a policy is carried out. It may even be possible to be non-sexist in ideology and practice, but without this having much effect in terms of encouraging tolerance, a sense of equality and lack of stereotyping in children if this new ideology is held in the context of a controlling, authoritarian relationship with the child. Challenging traditional notions of sex-appropriate behaviour obviously required that parents be conscious of how they were socialising their children, yet it appeared that too much concern and focussing on the child's behaviour would not give children the space to develop a sense of themselves as separate individuals with control over their own lives. An important aim of non-traditional sex role socialisation for these parents, was that children 'be their own person', that they be able to think for themselves and make their own decisions. One of the more speculative findings of the research was that this autonomy was as dependent on the nature of the parents' relationship with their children as in the thoroughness with which they counteracted traditional sex role stereotypes or attempted to provide a non-sexist environment.

13.5 Importance of Structural Factors

The importance of the kind of psychological factors described above was one way in which non-traditional sex role socialisation proved more complex than the social learning model with which I began the research. Another theme which emerged from the research and which is not explored by the social learning model is the importance of structural factors in maintaining traditional sex roles. It became increasingly evident as the data collection and analysis progressed that the extent to which parents could socialise their children in a less stereotyped way was greatly affected by the organisation of the society in which they lived. As I tried to find out whom children saw controlling power and resources, who was involved in the emotional as well as the practical side of childcare right from the child's birth, who made decisions and in what areas, it became clear that issues like these are embedded in the way that society is structured, and that change is needed on a larger scale than that of individual families in order to make non-sexist childrearing more possible. The ability of parents to share childcare and paid employment, and to be seen by their children as equals both inside and outside of the home, was severely limited by such factors as the low pay and status attached to women's work, inadequate childcare provision, few opportunities for jobs to be shared or held part-time with the same

fringe benefits as fulltime work, and a 'masculine' work ethos that stresses competition, overtime and 'getting on' at the expense of family involvement. Most parents in this study held the kind of job that gave them some degree of flexibility over their working hours and conditions, and those who did not experienced great difficulty in trying to alter the traditional division of labour whereby the man is responsible for earning the money and the woman for looking after children and home. Non-sexist childrearing was evidently not an individual solution to the problem of sexual inequality, yet by choosing consciously to socialise their children in a less stereotyped way the parents in this study were expressing their conviction that personal, individual change was effective in altering society. Most saw personal and political change as linked; their child-rearing policy, as Jenny Chadwick described it, was part of a 'two-pronged attack, structural change and attitude change'.

13.6 'Tomboys' and 'sissies'

Non-sexist childrearing had a different meaning for girls and boys. Parents held very similar aims for sons and daughters; that they be independent and caring, sensitive and adventurous, able to develop their potential

in traditionally feminine and masculine areas. However living in a society where males have more status and privileges meant that the process of putting these ideals into practice was different in the case of sons and of daughters. Most parents expressed greater ambivalence and uncertainty about bringing up boys in a less sexist way. A non-interventionist stance on issues such as clothing and provision of toys was much more common among the parents of boys; they were far more likely than parents of girls to say that a boy could have a doll 'if he wants one', or that they would talk about 'sex role issues' when he brings them up' rather than that they would initiate such discussions. Parents accepted non-traditional behaviour in boys, but appeared less prepared to encourage them actively to 'step out of line'. Their ambivalence was linked to an awareness of the different status of men and women in our society, where being born male entitles boys to power and privileges as adults which will be denied to their sisters. In such a context, bringing up boys in a non-sexist way was seen to involve greater problems, because of the greater pressures on boys to behave in traditionally 'masculine' ways and ridicule or rejection by peers for not doing so, because of the perception by parents that they would need to 'hold back' their sons in order to achieve sexual

equality, and because of the lack of a support network analagous to the Women's Movement for changes in the male sex role. Non-sexist childrearing for girls was perceived as less problematic, since daughters would gain from more flexible sex roles in terms of power and increased opportunities, whereas the gains for boys were less public and tangible, involving the development of sensitivity, awareness and emotional openness; changes which were seen as gains for women as much as for the men themselves. The sex of the child was thus a crucial factor in the way these parents conceived of non-sexist childrearing.

13.7 Change through Women

Related to the above theme was the finding that the impetus for non-traditional sex role socialisation came from women. This theme was supported by the predominance of strong, independent mothers in the parents' accounts of their own background, by the way in which men often cited particular women or the Women's Movement as the major source of their desire to alter traditional sex roles in their own and their children's lives, and by the greater commitment of the women in the study to the ideals of non-sexist childrearing. None of the men were antagonistic to the principle and many were very supportive, but the women's ideas were more strongly rooted in their

own experiences and in their awareness of the limitations of sex role stereotyping. Men were involved in non-sexist childrearing, as fathers and as sons, but a recurrent theme in these parents' accounts was of sex role change occurring through women, and for daughters.

13.8 Suggestions for Further research

This was a small-scale, intensive study investigating parents' perceptions of non-traditional sex role socialisation. In a relatively unexplored field, I aimed to 'map out the area and describe the field' and thereby provide an impetus and a framework for future research on the topic. Several avenues appear worthy of further investigation. These are:

a) Men bringing up children alone

The hypothesis of change through women could well be modified or extended by a consideration of the experiences of single fathers. Research with men committed to minimising sex role stereotyping and bringing up children alone, rather than men who are attempting to share childcare with a female partner, would thus be a useful direction for further research.

b) Focus on children

The focus of this study was deliberately on parents and their conceptions of non-sexist

childrearing. Having delineated the issues as they see them, it would be interesting to go on to investigate the behaviour and attitudes of children who are being raised in this way and to see how these attitudes interact with their parents' ideas, particularly given the latter's emphasis on children's active role in the sex role learning process.

c) Homosexual and lesbian parents

The parents in this study distinguished between gender identity, sex role and sexual orientation, and encouraged their children to explore alternatives to traditional roles but not to a traditional heterosexual orientation. All of the parents were themselves heterosexual, and it is likely that a fruitful direction for research would be to study the views of parents, or others involved in caring for children, who define themselves as lesbian, homosexual or bisexual.

13.9 Concluding remarks

For the parents in this study, non-sexist childrearing was about giving children power over themselves and their lives, rather than expecting them to fit into a role that restricted and oppressed them, or restricted and oppressed others. The parents described their aims and ideals in

relation to their children, the ways in which they were trying to put these ideals into practice, and the difficulties and problems they had encountered. It is hoped that this study, by sharing and analysing their experiences, will encourage others involved with young children to re-examine their behaviour and attitudes in their interaction with girls and boys.

APPENDIX 1 - PARENT ADVICE MANUALS PUBLISHED IN BRITAIN IN 1979 AND 1980

Published in 1979:

Brazelton Thomas	Toddlers and Parents	Penguin
British Medical Association	You and Your Baby	A Family Doctor Publication
Fenwick Peter & Elizabeth	The Baby Book for Fathers	Sphere
Fine Marvin	Parents vs Children	Prentice Hall
Gribben Trish	Pyjamas don't matter (or, what your baby really needs)	J. Murray
Health Visitors Assoc'n.	New Baby	B.Edsall & Co.
Leach Penelope	Baby and child care: from birth to age 5	Penguin
Lewis David	How to be a gifted parent	Souvenir Press
Mayle Peter	Baby Taming	Macmillan
Open University	'The First Years of Life' and 'The Pre-school Child'	OUEE
Salk Lee	Dear Dr Salk: answers to your questions about your family	Harper & Row
Spock Benjamin	Baby and Child Care	Bodley Head
Sturgess Rosemary	The Baby Book	Magnum Books
Trimmer Eric	Your Baby's First Year	Chancerel: Barrie & Jenkins

Published in 1980

Close Sylvia	The Toddler and the New Baby	RKP
Crowe Brenda	Living with a toddler	Allen & Unwin
Garner Lesley	The Basic Baby Book	Magread
Gold Stanley & Eisen Peter	How to bring up your parents	Macmillan
Jackson Brian	Living with children	Sphere
Little Peter	The Baby Book for dads	New English Library
Mayle Peter	How to be a pregnant father	Macmillan
Marzollo Jean	Supertot: a parents' guide to toddlers	Allen & Unwin
Rakowitz E and Rubin G	Living with your new baby: a survival guide for mothers and fathers	Souvenir Press

APPENDIX 2 - NON-SEXIST CHILDREARING STUDY : Interview Guide

BACKGROUND DETAILS:

1. Who lives in the house, jobs, names and ages of children.
2. Main caretakers since birth for each child. Have you been happy with these arrangements, or would you have preferred something else?

METHODS

What things are you aware of doing to avoid sex-stereotyping, and what do you try to avoid?

a) Toys

What toys do the children have, what are their favourites, is there anything you wouldn't allow?

If they asked for it, bought it with their own money? If it was given as a present?

Are there any toys you wouldn't buy for a (opposite sex child)?

Do you put your principles into practice with other people's children, or do you feel its not up to you to interfere?

b) Books

What books does child have, favourite stories, any books you don't like them having (comics?)

What would you do if child wanted a bedtime story you thought was sexist?

c) T.V.

Do children watch T.V. much? Favourite programmes. Do they watch with you? Do they take much notice of what they see?

Are there any programmes you disapprove of/forbid them to watch? Any programmes you think are especially good?

d) Games

What kind of games do children play - alone, with friends, with you? Any you'd discourage them from playing?

e) Chores

Does child help around the house much? What sort of things do you expect them to do?

f) Clothes

Do you have any kind of policy on the clothes you buy them? What do they prefer wearing. Anything you'd not let them wear - in private, in public? (Dresses for boys?) Why not?

Do people ever say the child will become a homosexual or anything like that? Is it something that bothers you at all?

g) Punishment and Discipline

How do you discipline the children when they do things you disagree with? Do you ever need to smack them at all?

What kind of behaviour do you normally have to stop them doing?

What do the children do that annoys you most?

h) Physical affection

How much physical affection do you feel children of their age should get?
How much do they get, who from? Do you see yourself stopping that to some extent when they get older?

i) Child's character

What kind of child is s/he? Could you describe her/him?

j) General

How would you react if the child really wanted to fulfil a traditional sex-role for any period of time (e.g. girl coy and frilly, boy not wanting to be cuddled and getting in fights?) Do you think this is an inevitable stage of growing up?

Do you think there will be other things it'll be more important to do when the child gets older? Will it be easier when you can talk things over more, or do you think you'll have less influence then?

AIMS AND IDEALS

Could you say what it means to you to bring up a child in a 'non-sexist' way. What are your aims, what kind of people would you like them to become.

Does non-sexist childrearing mean something different for boys and for girls? Is it easier with one sex than the other, or more important, or similar?

OUTSIDE INFLUENCES

Are there other influences on your child's ideas besides yourself? Who/what? (Relatives, your friends, child's friends (who are they?), their parents' views, media, school.)

SCHOOL

Has school affected (do you expect school to affect) your child's behaviour and ideas?

Have you tried/will you try to find out the school's views on sex roles?

How can you deal with differing values in the school? Should you try?
How effective can you be?

What kind of school would you like the child to go on to (single-sex/co-ed; selective/comprehensive). Would you choose the same for (opp.sex)?

What do you hope child gets out of schooling? (Academic success; athletic or musical ability; social skills)

SUPPORT FOR IDEAS

Where does support for your ideas come from?

How much support does (partner) provide? Do you think you're equally committed to non-sexist childrearing - in theory, in practice?

DIVISION OF LABOUR

Could you describe what you each did yesterday, from getting up? Was that a typical day?

DIVISION OF LABOUR continued

Could you tell me who normally does each of the following:

Childcare

getting child up
feeding
nappy changing
bathing, putting to bed
taking to school
talking to school about problems
looking after when ill
looking after in school holidays
playing with, reading to
disciplining
buying clothes for
giving pocket money
comforting when upset

Household Tasks

cooking
cleaning
shopping
washing up
washing clothes
decorating
repairs
gardening
mending car
driving (when together)
making decisions
deciding to move house
paying bills (joint or separate accounts?)
buying birthday cards or -
presents for relatives.

How important do you think what you do is, as compared with what you say to the child (example of traditional division of labour plus non-sexist discussion).

Are there any changes in society which you think would make non-sexist childrearing easier?

Do you expect attitudes to sex roles to have changed when your children are grown up? In what way?

OWN UPBRINGING

I'm obviously interested in what makes parents decide to bring up their children in a non-sexist way in the first place, so I'd like to finish with a few questions about your own upbringing.

a) Family

What kind of family life did you have? Close or distant - then and now?

Brothers and sisters, age and present situations and attitudes. If different from yours, why you think that is.

Do your parents approve of your lifestyle and your ideas on bringing up children? How different is the way you're bringing up your children from the way you yourself were brought up?

Parents' jobs. Did your mother work - after birth of children?

Parents' division of housework and childcare.

b) School

What kind of school did you go to? Subjects taken.

What ambitions did your parents have for you, what did you have for yourself?

Interests and hobbies as a child.

c) To date

Could you describe briefly what you've done since leaving school.

Are there any people or periods in your life that have had a significant influence on the way you think now? (parent, teacher, university, women's group, lover or spouse, friend).

d) Interests

What kind of things are you involved in now? (Interests, organisations - political, religious, feminist)

Are you/have you been involved in the Women's Movement? If yes, length and type of involvement.

Did getting involved change your ideas on bringing up children at all?

How far do you think the things you do can have an effect on the way your children think and behave given the way society is organised at the moment?

APPENDIX 3

PRETEND DAY - Instruction Sheet

Equipment

2 child cut-out dolls

3 adult dolls (dressed)

2 spare child dolls; 1 boy holding doll, 1 girl holding football.

Box of clothes - trousers, tracksuit, dungarees, frilly dress, pinafore dress and T-shirt, skirt and jumper

2 shoe box beds

Bath, sink, cooker -

Shoe box car

I've got some dolls here. Let's pretend that this doll is you, this one is ---, and these are (parents). Is there anybody else who lives here that we ought to have a doll for?

Look, you're asleep in your bed. It's morning and its time to wake up. Who's going to get you up? Does --- get you up sometimes instead?

Here's your clothes in this wardrobe. What are you going to wear today? Do you usually wear ---? Don't you like wearing ---?

Now you're ready to have your breakfast. Who's going to get it for you? Does --- ever get it instead?

What happens now - do you go out to nursery/school or stay at home? Do (parents) go out or do they stay at home? Who's going to take you to nursery/school? (if car) Who's going to drive?

What are you going to play with at the nursery/school/home? Who do you play with?

Here's a little boy at the nursery/school. He's brought his doll with him because he likes it a lot, and some children laugh at him and say he's silly because boys don't play with dolls. Do you think boys can play with dolls?

This little girl wants to play football but the boys say she can't, and her friends tell her to come and play house with them instead. What's she going to do?

Now it's time to go home. Who's coming to pick you up? Who's getting your tea ready? Who washes up? Gives you a bath/puts you to bed/ reads you a story/ etc.

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